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OTHERS
FOR 1919

OTHERS FOR 1919

An Anthology of the New Verse

Edited by Alfred Kreymborg

==

NICHOLAS L. BROWN
NEW YORK MCMXX

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To The Others

On, crusaders!

Whither?

Nowhere!

The past?

Sneers!

Present?

Snarls!

Future?

Snubs!

Fodder?

Cocoanuts!

Where?

In trees!

How?

At your heads!

Do?

You!

On, crusaders!

A. K.

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Conrad Aiken: Conversation, Undertones, *Youth, Poetry of Today*. Witter Bynner: Group from "The Beloved Stranger," Alfred A. Knopf. Emanuel Carnevali: Kiss, the *Little Review*. H. L. Davis: Primapara, *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*. Donald Evans: Group from "Two Deaths in the Bronx," Nicholas L. Brown. Robert Frost: Mending Wall from "North of Boston," Henry Holt & Co.; Not to Keep, the *Yale Review*; The Axe-Helve, the *Atlantic Monthly*. Arturo Giovannitti: The Walker from "Arrows in the Gale," Hillacre Bookhouse. Orrick Johns: Kysen from "Black Branches," Pagan Publishing Co. Vachel Lindsay: Whimseys, *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*. Haniel Long: Students, the *New Republic* and The N. Y. Poetry Bookshop. Max Michelson: Masks, *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*. Marianne Moore:

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CONVERSATION: UNDERTONES

What shall we talk of — Li Po? Hokusai? —
You narrow your long dark eyes to fascinate me;
You smile a little. . . . Outside, the night goes by.
I walk alone in a forest of ghostly trees. . . .
Your pale hands rest palm downwards on your knees.

These lines — converging — they suggest such distance!

The soul is drawn away, beyond horizons,—
Lured out to what? One dares not think.
Sometimes — I glimpse these infinite perspectives
In intimate talk (—with such as you) and
shrink. . . .

‘One feels so petty!—One feels such — emptiness!—’

You mimic horror, let fall your lifted hand,
And smile at me; with brooding tenderness. . . .
Alone in darkened waters I fall and rise;
Slow waves above me break, faint waves of cries.

‘And then, these colors . . . but who would dare describe them?’

This faint rose-coral pink . . . this green —
pistachio? —

So insubstantial! Like the dim ghostly things
Two lovers find in love's still twilight chambers . . .
Old peacock-fans, and fragrant silks and rings. . . .

'Rings, let us say, drawn from the hapless fingers
Of some great lady many centuries nameless,—
Or is that too sepulchral? —dulled with dust;
And necklaces that crumble if you touch them;
And gold brocades that breathed on, fall to rust,—

'No — I am wrong . . . it is not these I sought
for —

Why did they come to mind? — You understand
me —

You know these strange vagaries of the brain! —
— I walk alone in a forest of ghostly trees;
Your pale hands rest palm downwards on your
knees;

These strange vagaries of yours are all too plain.

'But why perplex ourselves with tedious problems
Of art or . . . such things? . . . While we sit here,
living

With all that's in our secret hearts to say! —
Hearts? — Your pale hand softly strokes the satin.
You play deep music — know well what you play.
You stroke the satin with thrilling of fingertips,
You smile, with faintly perfumed lips,
You loose your thoughts like birds,

Brushing our dreams with soft and shadowy
words. . . .

We know your words are foolish, yet here we stay,
I to be played on, you to play;

We know our words are foolish, yet sit here bound
In tremulous webs of sound.

‘How beautiful is intimate talk like this!—

It is as if we dissolved grey walls between us,
Stepped through the solid portals become but
shadows,

To hear a sudden music. . . . Our own vast shadows
Lean to a giant size on the windy walls,

Or dwindle away; we hear our soft footfalls

Echo forever behind us, ghostly clear.

Music sings far off, flows suddenly near,

And dies away like rain. . . .

We walk through subterranean caves again,—
Vaguely above us feeling

A shadowy weight of frescoes on the ceiling,

Strange half-lit things,

Soundless grotesques with writhing claws and
wings. . . .

And here a beautiful face looks down upon us;

And someone hurries before, unseen, and sings. . . .

Have we seen all, I wonder, in these chambers—

Or is there yet some gorgeous vault arched low,

Where sleeps an amazing beauty we do not
know? . . .’

The question falls: we walk in silence together
Thinking of that deep vault, and of its secret. . . .
This lamp, these books, this fire
Are suddenly blown away in a whistling darkness.
Deep walls crash down in the whirlwind of desire.

PORTRAIT OF ONE DEAD

This is her house. On one side there is darkness,
On one side there is light.
Into the darkness you may lift your lanterns —
O, any number — it will still be night.
And there are echoing stairs to lead you downward
To long sonorous halls.
And here is spring forever at these windows,
With roses on the walls.

This is her room. On one side there is music —
On one side not a sound.
At one step she could move from love to silence,
Feel myriad darkness coiling round.
And here are balconies from which she heard you,
Your steady footstep on the stair.
And here the glass in which she saw your shadow
As she unbound her hair.

Here is the room — with ghostly walls dissolving —
The twilight room in which she called you 'lover';

And the floorless room in which she called you
‘friend.’

So many times, in doubt, she ran between them! —
Through windy corridors of darkening end.

Here she could stand with one dim light above her
And hear far music, like a sea in caverns,
Beating away at hollowed walls of stone.
And here, in a roofless room when it was raining,
She bore the patient sorrow of rain alone.

Your words were walls which suddenly froze around
her.

Your words were windows — large enough for moon-
light,

Too small to let her through.

Your letters — fragrant cloisters faint with music.
The music that assuaged her there was you.

How many times she heard your step ascending
Yet never saw your face!

She heard them turn again, ring slowly fainter,
Till silence swept the place.

Why had you gone? . . . The door, perhaps, mis-
taken. . . .

You would go elsewhere. The deep walls were
shaken.

A certain roseleaf — sent without intention —

Became, with time, a woven web of fire —
She wore it, and was warm.
A certain hurried glance, let fall at parting,
Became, with time, the flashings of a storm.

Yet there was nothing asked, no hint to tell you
Of secret idols carved in secret chambers
From all you did and said.
Nothing was done, until at last she knew you.
Nothing was known till somehow she was dead.

How did she die? — You say she died of poison.
Simple and swift. And much to be regretted.
You did not see her pass
So many thousand times from light to darkness,
Pausing so many times before her glass;

You did not see how many times she hurried
To lean from certain windows, vainly hoping,
Passionate still for beauty, remembered spring.
You did not know how long she clung to music,
You did not hear her sing:

Did she, then, make her choice, and step out bravely
From sound to silence — close, herself, those
windows?

Or was it true, instead,
That darkness moved, — for once, — and so possessed
her? . . .

We'll never know, you say, for she is dead.

VEILS

This veil
Of lavender and dawn
Floats off
Invisible,
And this of purple noon
Unwinds in wisdom,
And this of evening
Twitters, undulates,
Dips, darts,
And this of night
Circles around me singing
To the very edge and presence of the young moon —
And it brushes the tip
Like lips
Three times.

LIGHTNING

There is a solitude in seeing you,
Followed by your company when you are gone.
You are like heaven's veins of lightning.
I cannot see till afterward
How beautiful you are.
There is a blindness in seeing you,
Followed by the sight of you when you are gone.

HORSES

Words are hoops
Through which to leap upon meanings,
Which are horses' backs,
Bare, moving.

CRYSTAL

Between your laughter and mine
Lies the shadow of the sword of change.

Yours is innocent.
Mine knows.

You had sat abstracted
By the touch of dreaming strings
Of an old guitar —
When in the centre of the room
A crystal dish cracked for no reason.

Then you darted with joy to the fragments,
Like a fish to a crumb,
And held between your thumbs and your fingers
Two pieces of laughter.

NAKEDNESS

Brightness of earth for the hollow of your throat
They brought to you,
And blossoms of death for you to throw away
And many things like links of chains,
To you whose wings are nakedness.

But I have given your nakedness the gift of mine,
And whosoever brings, from this day forth,
Obeisances
To the hollow of your bosom,
Shall find between those hills of sun,
Beloved,
My shadow. . . .

SINGING

What is this singing I hear
Of the sun behind clouds?

It is not long before you shall come to me,
Beloved.

And that is the singing I lean to hear
In my side,
Where your bird is.

DUSK

Dusk came over the hill to me,
Holding a red moon,
And I danced with her,
Feeling and following her starry steps,
Till she turned and gave the moon
To the swarthy night —
And slipped away without explaining.

WEARINESS

There is a dear weariness of love . . .
Hand relaxed in hand,
Shoulder at rest upon shoulder.

And to me that pool of weariness is more wonderful
Than crater, cataract,
Maelstrom, earthquake . . .

For it is a double pool
In which lie, silent,
The golden fishes of sleep.

THE MOON

Red leaped
The moon,
From behind the black hill of night . . .
And soon it was silver forever
And there was no change . . .

Until its time came . . .

And its setting was as white as a corpse,
Among the flowers of dawn.

LEER

If I might be tall negroes in procession,
Carrying each of them a rib of you,
And a cannibal-king bearing your collar-bones,
One in my right hand, one in my left,
And touching my forehead with them at slow intervals,
Might I not be too comforted
To weep?

If my love had only consumed you,
Not left you unconsumed,
Might not the moon have silvered me with content,
Oiled me like the long edges of palms?

THE APPRENTICE

I

CHANSON DE BLACKBOULÉ

Just as the passing wind
catches the word of the glittering leaves,
I'd make your curled lips tingle
with a swift kiss — should you let me.
Instead,
you see me bent and doubled up
by silence
in silence
and my words are harsh,
sounds of a body that breaks.

You turn your wide eyes,
ever bewildered,
bewildered as the sun when it glances
its first glance on the lake, at dawn,
you see all things with newness,
you see all,
all but my love.
Well, that's how it goes, eh, Annie?
All but my clumsy, self-accursed love

under my bent and folded
body,
body awe-full of raptures,
awe-full of the tree-tops and leaves skipping, snap-
ping
under those clouds, —
clouds that the moon is kissing
over my silent head.
That's how things go and that's
precisely how things should go —
that's how the wind presses our cheeks a moment
and slips
behind us away, it's how
it stretches a ribbon over our eyelids
and pulls it from behind, it's my heels pounding the
side-walk ;
it's how things go, the way
they happen,
the morning, the evening and night —
how they come and they go and are going
and linger,
it's love that comes and love
that does not come.

I'll say no hands
will know your hands as mine do,
your hands that are soft as the grass is.
But there's no answer coming
to me, so

don't worry, Annie.

Don't worry, wide round eyes.

Do turn around and

around, wide round eyes,

and soft slender hands do whisper
of easy happiness and of a young
motherliness,

and you, dear child, do say,

do say and repeat,

do repeat most vigorously

that you don't love me.

I have today again uncovered the sky and have found
it

ever so cool and ever so new, under.

I wait for no answer, and no thing

to ask, and no thing

to say, besides what you know and I know

and that which

to the end of days

will have one and an only

meaning

and no meaning

and all meanings and

the

meaning.

II

KISS

You think you can leave the matter to your lips
and they don't work right
and then
it's two deadmen shaking hands
saying "Howdydo Sir?"

III

SERENADE

Come on, don't be afraid you'll spoil me
if you light the gas in your room
and show me
that you have heard my cries.

Are you so poor in kisses
that you're so stingy with them;
and is your heart so ravaged
that you won't let me pick there
one or two flowers? . . .
Oh, never mind what I'll do with them!
I'm going to teach you yet
what rapture is.

I play my serenade
beating my clenched fist
on a gong and a drum.
What I want is to give you
the sound of what a man is.

I love my eyes and lips
better than yours;
besides, the dampness of the night
pierces my shoes.

I can be as capricious
as you can be, don't worry!

Come on, open that window
or I'll go home.

PRIMAPARA

PROUD RIDERS

We rode hard, and brought the cattle from brushy
springs,
From heavy dying thickets, leaves wet as snow;
From high places, white-grassed, and dry in the
wind;
Draws where the quaken-asps were yellow and white,
And the leaves spun and spun like money spinning.
We poured them onto the trail, and rode for town.

Men in the fields leaned forward in the wind,
Stood in the stubble and watched the cattle passing.
The wind bowed all, the stubble shook like a shirt.
We threw the reins by the yellow and black fields, and
rode,
And came, riding together, into the town
Which is by the grey bridge, where the alders are.
The white-barked alder trees dropping big leaves
Yellow and black, into the cold black water.
Children, little cold boys, watched after us —
The freezing wind flapped their clothes like windmill
paddles.
Down the flat frosty road we crowded the herd:
High stepped the horses for us, proud riders in au-
tumn.

RUNNING VINES IN A FIELD

Look up, you loose-haired women in the field,
From work, and thoughtless picking at the ground.
Cease for a little: pay me a little heed.

It is early: the red leaves of the blackberry vines
Are hoar with frosty dew, the ground's still wet,
There is vapor over toward the summer fallow.
And you three make a garden, being put by —
Since you are too old for love you make a garden?

It is love with me, and not these dark red frosty
leaves
The vines of which you root for garden-space.
You will be concerned, you three used up and set by:
I could speak of the red vines, of pastures, of young
trees;
And you would dabble at love as you do the vine-
roots.

It is early, but before your backs be warmed,
And before all this dew be cleared and shed,
I shall be half among your hearts with speech:
Love, and my sorrow, the disastrous passages,
So that you'll cease all gardening, dangle dark red
Vines in your hands not knowing it, and whisper.

They forget me for a little pride of old time.

THE GYPSY GIRL

One cherry tree beside the house in this low field
Is yellow and bright-colored now. Several weeds
Are full of brown seed, and the ground is drying out
hard.

What is not picked, now, in the garden, will never be
picked.

In this fall, by this garden of grey stems and seeds
I sit in what dusty grass is left, and words
Come in groups, like floss upon the pale green water.
They concern the gypsy girl, fat with child, and
sickly

Complexioned, who, I think, made me offers.

Her long black hair
And yellow face above the pale green water at night-
fall.

The gypsy girl was sallow, as if with nightfall,
Paler looking because of the necklace of red beads,
And because of her rings and bracelets of heavy
silver.

There was a silk scarf, green and yellow, upon her
hair,

Her most dark and heavy hair, bound at the back in
small

Silver bands, all heavy ; and light-colored and green
silk

Was her bright dress, which was stretched with her
young one

So that its pattern shaped into big ungodly flowers.
She came through the short willows ; she came beside
me

Smiling as if a crowd were watching her from the
weeds.

“ What is not picked, now, in the garden, will never
be picked,”

I say, before this garden.

I felt her child's heart beating,
And, for thinking of that heart and of her lover,
The “ Come, there is some good place near,” and the
feel of her hand,

I would not answer. This which might have dis-
persed

The many girls who have appeared to me sleeping,
I would not consent to.

It was that. I say to the sand,
Nevertheless, as if to one person: “ Dear love, de-
parted,

Can some season not freshen us? I am disheartened ;
Are there many like the dark girl? are there many
like me? ”

But what is not picked now in the garden will never
be picked.

THE SPIRIT

In the early spring, the fattening young weeds
Appear, all green, their veins stretched, amongst
their dead.

And every sand-hill, with its bundle of willow
And young green riding the sand, is my pleasant
walk.

The river, every rock there, and the wind
Molding cold waves, have seen a spirit by day
Which I would see; and now that my heart's a poor
hired one

Which owns no favor or love, but did awhile,
I walk my pleasant walks. Where the new dark red
Willows feather in sand against the sky,
I make out a spirit sitting by the new grass:
The sun shines yellow on the hair, and a wind blows
That would melt snow, but her face calls it on.
And her hands are quiet in her red sleeves all day.
"All my pleasure begins when you come to this
place."

"I am sorry for it, spirit, yet I most wished it;
Has my heart commanding shamed me to your eyes?"
"Never in life shall these eyes see you shamed.
I half live, like a stalk, but no girl orders me."

MY STEP-GRANDFATHER

My step-grandfather sat during the noon spell
Against the wild crabapple tree, by the vines.
Flies about the high hot fern played, or fell
To his beard, or upon the big vein of his hand.
With their playing he seemed helpless and old, in a
land

Where new stumps, piles of green brush, fresh-burnt
pines,

Were young and stubborn. He mentioned the old
times

As if he thought of this: "I have marched, and run
Over the old hills, old plowed land, with my gun
Bumping furrows — oh, years old. But in this new
place

There is nothing I know. I ride a strange colt."

"You know old times, and have seen some big man's
face:

Out of the old times, what do you remember most?"

"General Lee. Once they called us out in a cold
Plowed field, to parade for him. He was old with
frost.

I remember our style of dress; my dead friends last
long,

(I would have thought longer); and there were
peaked women

Who watched us march, and joked with us as they
were trimming

The green shoots of wild roses to eat. But these
with me

Lack what the other has — they are not so strong.

And lost battles? — I would be prouder starving in
rain

And beaten and running every day, with General Lee,
Than fat and warm, winning under another man."

Alone presently, I laid myself face down

To avoid seeing the field; and thought of how the
book

Describes Esther; and imagined how that queen might
look,

Preferred for beauty, in her old fields red and brown.

"I am like my step-grandfather," I thought, "and
could

Follow whatever I love, blind and bold;

Or go hungry and in great shame, and, for a cause,
be proud."

And I came to work, sad to see him so old.

THE VALLEY HARVEST

Honey in the horn! I brought my horse from the
water

And from the white grove of tall alders over the
spring,

And brought him past a row of high hollyhocks
Which flew and tore their flowers thin as his mane.
And women there watched, with hair blown over their
mouths ;
Yet in watching the oat field they were quiet as the
spring.

“ Are the hollyhocks full bloomed? It is harvest
then.

The hay falls like sand falling in a high wind
When the weeds blow and fly — but steady the sand
falls.

It is harvest, harvest, and honey in the horn.
I would like to go out, in a few days, through the
stubble field,
And to all the springs — yours too we have known
for years —
And to the bearing vines, and clean the berries from
them.”

Call, women! — why do you stand if not for your
pride's sake?

But the women would neither call to me nor speak,
Nor to any man not mowing during their harvest.
They watched with their hair blowing, near the stalks,
In the row of red hollyhocks.

Quiet as the spring.

What is by the spring? A bird, and a few old leaves.

JOY

He swings upon the high green boughs of life
Up to the stars and down.

Curious about the noisy earth
He parts the leaves to look.
He has the face of a child

Aloof and whimsical
Hearing the slow complaint
Of rheumatism and old age.
Mischievous clears the puzzled brows

He shakes the tree . . .
Oh the glittering scented shower . . .
Oh the enraptured quiet. . . .

THE ENCHANTED CASTLE

We climbed to it by secret flights
of kisses . . .

When the door burst open
it vanished . . .

Crash . . .

Bump . . .

Earth again . . .

"What are they saying?"

"There's a baby coming . . ."

“ He scuttled off on rat’s feet . . . ”

“ The girl’s in the ditch . . . ”

“ And the castle? ”

“ You don’t mean to say
you believe that faery story? ”

TO A FUMBLING LOVER

The sea would know the way to go about it
The moon has taught the tide a thousand
subtle ways of mastery
so that it neither lingers nor makes haste
knows when to come, when to go —
when to drown the rebel shores in cool sweet rapture
when to leave them naked and alone.
I envy colored rocks and all obliterate sands;
it would content me to be lost
in a swirl of shining waters —
half light — half song . . .
Why are you not the sea? . . .

THE PRAYER RUG

It is made of silences —
many colored silken threads —
the purple of various deaths —
red gold sacrifice —

meditation — a delicate green stillness
melting into blues of ecstasy.
These are the background
for one thread
that follows the mystic outline
of a cross —
and in the centre wreathed
seven red roses
seven fires of silence . . .
To pray
is to stand upon these
with naked feet
breast bare to the sun
and to sing.

DEFEAT

The pit is lined sharply with stones —
My bones are broken too . . .
This would be hard to bear
if I had not plucked the feathers of dead dreams
to pillow it.
I shall not move for a long while —
I am out with stars
since that last encounter
and I need no companions
other than the strange slim shapes of laughter
that come twisting out of tears

and circling close
to touch my wounds
with rainbow breath.

THE SEWING BEE

On a wintry afternoon
They bring their work
And settle round the hearth
A faint half circle of ladylike emotions
Withered now and near the end
They sit embroidering
with fine silk of remembrance
Samples of my past history.
Their crackling gossip pricks
like splintered glass.
When I go in they flutter to me
yearning and coquettish
I am amused to speak in a bold voice
Indelicate truths, rich in blood red oaths
And when they are shocked away
To sprawl alone
full lengthened and masculine
filling my pipe with dark strong thoughts
On the emancipation of woman
flesh or sprite.

ANNABEL

Annabel it is who always answers me —
who keeps my house, who bears me docile children.
When Annabel forgets that her smiles are mine
a bolt slips —

In a wild-flower garden a humming-bird woman
darts and flits.

To move would mean the flash of wings
and silence —

When she forgets that sorrow must be shared with
me
mist clears —

A grave young man kneels at an altar. . .
Her eyes burn past me ever longing, ever seeking . . .
When she forgets herself and me in sleep
she lies with baby-lids half open.

I see a shining stretch of sea . . . fierce blue . . .
a slim brown shape . . . dancing feet of rapture.
This is that one whose voice I heard once in a dream.
This is that one whom to possess I married Annabel.
This is that one whom to escape Annabel married me.

PORTRAIT OF NANCY TREVORS

They sat in her drawing-room amid easeful silence in
tolerant enmity.

The men were three, and her husband was the third.
This in its way amplified his urbanity.

His suavities were of ivory.

He was more irreproachable than her virginal tea-
cups.

She gave her lips to the moment, and her fingers
nestled in a bowl of apricots.

The tea was amber, and the pungent lemon and the
blanched sugar

Seized and caressed the eyes as each man took a prof-
fered cup.

It loosed the tongues, and the four were free.

As four portraits on a wall come to life they stirred
the silence with a babbling that gleamed.

The drawing-room was draped in a wistaria mist,
And the flutter of the phrases patted the cheek with
an alien charm.

In but a short while she had become dominant,
And then she wrapped herself in the soothing nerves
of excitement.

The three were lost in the pursuit of fragrance.
Their chairs were their kingdoms, and there were no
other empires.

Archly then her voice dared:

“Will you have another cup, my beloved?”

It was three cups that rang to her, and her husband's, it chanced, was the third.

She smiled over her adroit and ample confession, and
it was enough.

She had done with the hour,

And she let the uneasy hush turn to a hoddenn-grey.

DINNER AT THE HOTEL DE LA TIGRESSE VERTE

As they sat sipping their glasses in the courtyard
Of the Hotel de la Tigresse Verte,
With their silk-swathed ankles softly kissing,
They were certain that they had forever
Imprisoned fickleness in the vodka —
They knew they had found the ultimate pulse of love.

Story upon story, the dark windows whispered down
To them from above, and over the roof's edge
Danced a grey moon.

The woman pressed her chicken-skin fan against her breast

And through her ran trepidant mutinies of desire
With treacheries of emotion. Her voice vapoured:

“In which room shall it be to-night, darling?”

His eyes swept the broad façade, the windows,
Tier upon tier, and his lips were regnant:

“In every room, my beloved!”

FOR THE HAUNTING OF MAUNA BODY OF THE QUEEN

Suave body of the Queen, she gave me you,
Misting in still, warm rains of tenderness —
But kept herself, and we are each betrayed.
You are her mistress, and she makes of me
Another mistress! Playthings are we both,
When we thought she meant us for full sovereignty;
It was not regal, and her throne is stained.
She bade you seek me, and your singing feet
Ran quickly, surely; you held out your hands.
You had no fear because you felt my heart
Leap as you laid your white breast under it.
We had no prides to conquer as we kissed,
For we knew kinship in our overthrow.
Yet now she stands apart and questions us.
How can she question — leave me out of it —
But you, her body, her sweet source of joy, —

How can she then divide herself from you,
And calmly reckon what the gain may be?
The hour will come when she will tire of us,
And all your softness will be broken up,
Your rioting lips chilled with an ashen wind.
There is a hint of vileness in the air,
And on the strings a dance of ironies,
With love's scarecrow jiggling wearily . . .
Still I have you — so I am not afraid!

MARY DOUGLASS BRUITING THE BEAUTY OF THE HANDS OF MONSIEUR Y.

Monsieur Y., the artist, has haunting hands —
Fingers that are unforgettable.
I have sat for arrested spaces,
Pondering the influence of their inhibitions —
Gazing at a battlefield where emotions
Had been in tragic conflict.
The hands are to the first glance decently formed,
But they awaken curiosity rather than admiration,
For the essence of their exquisiteness
Is not quickly to be felt.
Their beauty is draped — as all enduring beauty
Must be — with indifference.

Monsieur Y. has always been indulgent to me.
His studio I seek as an asylum

From the wolves — my dear friends.
He says he is not my friend,
And for the whim I have believed it.
One November afternoon when I knew he would be
Heartily engrossed on his new canvas,
And I was chilled with Broadway's ineptitudes,
I sought his presence.
It was even a chillier welcome I received,
But there is sometimes a flame in frigidity
That gives the longed-for social shock.

He lit the lamp for the tea kettle,
And went back to work,
Leaving me to the half-shadowed intimacies of house-
wifery.

The tea service is simply done,
So I was soon free to regard him,
And his brusqueness stirred me to protest.
I parried first — for I am not stupid —
And asked whether he thought
It was a strain of pity for the fallen Madonnas
He painted so admirably that had given his hands
An immaculate augustness that was smoothed away
Into a catholic simplicity.
That was grandiose, but it won a rejoinder.
I had not whispered of the spirituality,
But it was that he offered me.
I had seized the nuance.
“ You have an insistent way,” he said,

“ But insistence has its boundaries.
Yet you are a mirror, and a mirror
Is sometimes a solution.
It glimmers back one's futility.
I like my hands more than you do,
For they are the symbols
Of the only triumph I shall ever know.
They are the trophies of my conquering.
A long time ago I was absorbed with love for a
 woman,
Who was merely touched with fragrant pleasure
Because I worshipped her.
She, too, was in love, but not with me.
We met often,
And spent long hours together and alone,
When only the sheerest intervals separated us.
We luncheoned, we dined, we theatred together.
We walked and talked. And we tea-cupped.
She gave me of the sight of her loveliness
In abundant generosity because I adored her.
And all the time I had my hands. All the hours
I was at her side they ached to touch,
To move over her — not to grasp in bestial, impera-
 tive fashion,
But to finger, to question the softness of her flesh,
To sing as they crept over her,
To give the quick, wild quivers of possession.
But because of the pride of the saffron highway
I never touched her ;

I held back through all the evasions of our communion.

She came to like me very much, though I never
Thrilled her to a fine surrender.

But it has worked its way out —

For she was brought to realize

That because I did not make a false tempo

With the hungry hands there was homage to be paid
them.

Now, I think it is really time for you to go.

There was the secret of his perfect hands —

They were still full of yearning blood.

All his desire had leaped out into them,

And it remained there —

The hands were two lovers, vainly waiting for their
hour.

MENDING WALL

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each,
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.

My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
"Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

NOT TO KEEP

They sent him back to her. The letter came
Saying . . . and she could have him. And before
She could be sure there was no hidden ill
Under the formal writing, he was in her sight —

Living. — They gave him back to her alive —
How else? They are not known to send the dead —
And not disfigured visibly. His face? —
His hands? She had to look — to ask
“What is it, dear?” And she had given all
And still she had all — *they* had — they the lucky!
Wasn't she glad now? Everything seemed won,
And all the rest for them permissible ease.
She had to ask “What was it, dear?”

“Enough,
Yet not enough. A bullet through and through,
High in the breast. Nothing but what good care
And medicine and rest — and you a week,
Can cure me of to go again.” The same
Grim giving to do over for them both.
She dared no more than ask him with her eyes
How was it with him for a second trial.
And with his eyes he asked her not to ask.
They had given him back to her, but not to keep.

THE AXE-HELVE

I've known ere now an interfering branch
Of alder catch my lifted axe behind me.
But that was in the woods, to hold my hand
From striking at another alder's roots,
And that was, as I say, an alder branch.
This was a man, Baptiste, who stole one day

Behind me on the snow in my own yard
Where I was working at the chopping-block,
And cutting nothing not cut down already.
He caught my axe expertly on the rise,
When all my strength put forth was in his favor,
Held it a moment where it was, to calm me,
Then took it from me — and I let him take it.
I didn't know him well enough to know
What it was all about. There might be something
He had in mind to say to a bad neighbor
He might prefer to say to him disarmed.
But all he had to tell me in French-English
Was what he thought of — not me, but my axe;
Me only as I took my axe to heart.
It was the bad axe-helve someone had sold me —
'Made on machine,' he said, ploughing the grain
With a thick thumbnail to show how it ran
Across the handle's long-drawn serpentine,
Like the two strokes across a dollar sign.

'You give her one good crack, she's snap raght off.
Den where's your hax-'ead fling t'rough de hair?'

Admitted; and yet, what was that to him?

'Come on my house and I put you one in
What's las' awhile — good hick'ry what's grow
crooked,
De second growt' I cut myself — tough, tough!'

Something to sell? That wasn't how it sounded.

'Den when you say you come? It's cost you nothing.

To-naght?'

As well to-night as any night.

Beyond an over-warmth of kitchen stove
My welcome differed from no other welcome.
Baptiste knew best why I was where I was.
So long as he would leave enough unsaid,
I shouldn't mind his being overjoyed
(If overjoyed he was) at having got me
Where I must judge if what he knew about an axe,
That not everybody else knew, was to count
For nothing in the measure of a neighbor.
Hard if, though cast away for life 'mid Yankees,
A Frenchman couldn't get his human rating!

Mrs. Baptiste came in and rocked a chair
That had as many motions as the world:
One back and forward, in and out of shadow,
That got her nowhere; one more gradual,
Sideways, that would have run her on the stove
In time, had she not realized her danger
And caught herself up bodily, chair and all,
And set herself back where she started from.
'She ain't spick too much Henglish — dat's too bad.'
I was afraid, in brightening first on me,

Then on Baptiste, as if he understood
What passed between us, she was only feigning.
Baptiste was anxious for her; but no more
Than for himself, so placed he couldn't hope
To keep his bargain of the morning with me
In time to keep me from suspecting him
Of really never having meant to keep it.

Needlessly soon he had his axe-helves out,
A quiverful to choose from, since he wished me
To have the best he had, or had to spare —
Not for me to ask which, when what he took
Had beauties he had to point me out at length
To insure their not being wasted on me.
He liked to have it slender as a whipstock,
Free from the least knot, equal to the strain
Of bending like a sword across the knee.
He showed me that the lines of a good helve
Were native to the grain before the knife
Expressed them, and its curves were no false curves
Put on it from without. And there its strength lay
For the hard work. He chafed its long white body
From end to end with his rough hand shut round it.
He tried it at the eye-hole in the axe-head.
'Hahn, hahn,' he mused, 'don't need much taking
down.'

Baptiste knew how to make a short job long
For love of it, and yet not waste time either.

Do you know, what we talked about was knowledge?
Baptiste on his defense about the children
He kept from school, or did his best to keep —
Whatever school and children and our doubts
Of laid-on education had to do
With the curves of his axe-helves and his having
Used these unscrupulously to bring me
To see for once the inside of his house.
Was I desired in friendship, partly as some one
To leave it to, whether the right to hold
Such doubts of education should depend
Upon the education of those who held them?
But now he brushed the shavings from his knee
And stood the axe there on its horse's hoof,
Erect, but not without its waves, as when
The snake stood up for evil in the Garden, —
Top-heavy with a heaviness his short,
Thick hand made light of, steel-blue chin drawn down
And in a little — a French touch in that.
Baptiste drew back and squinted at it, pleased:
' See how she's cock her head! '

THE WALKER

I hear footsteps over my head all night,
They come and they go. Again they come and
they go all night.

They come one eternity in four paces and they
go one eternity in four paces, and between the coming
and the going there is Silence and the Night and the
Infinite.

For infinite are the nine feet of a prison cell, and
endless is the march of him who walks between the
yellow brick wall and the red iron gate, thinking
things that cannot be chained and cannot be locked,
but that wander far away in the sunlit world, each in
a wild pilgrimage after a destined goal.

.

Throughout the restless night I hear the foot-
steps over my head.

Who walks? I know not. It is the phantom of
the jail, the sleepless brain, a man, the man, the
Walker.

One-two-three-four: four paces and the wall.

One-two-three-four: four paces and the iron
gate.

He has measured his space, he has measured it
accurately, scrupulously, minutely, as the hangman

measures the rope and the gravedigger the coffin — so many feet, so many inches, so many fractions of an inch for each of the four paces.

One-two-three-four. Each step sounds heavy and hollow over my head, and the echo of each step sounds hollow within my head as I count them in suspense and in dread that once, perhaps, in the endless walk, there may be five steps instead of four between the yellow brick wall and the red iron gate.

But he has measured the space so accurately, so scrupulously, so minutely that nothing breaks the grave rhythm of the slow, fantastic march.

.

When all are asleep (and who knows but I when all sleep?) three things are still awake in the night: the Walker, my heart and the old clock which has the soul of a fiend — for never, since a coarse hand with red hair on its fingers swung for the first time the pendulum in the jail, has the old clock tick-tocked a full hour of joy.

Yet the old clock which marks everything, and to everything tolls the death knell, the wise old clock that knows everything, does not know the number of the footsteps of the Walker, nor the throbs of my heart.

For not for the Walker, nor for my heart is there a second, a minute, an hour or anything that is in the old clock — there is nothing but the night, the sleepless night, the watchful, wistful night, and

footsteps that go, and footsteps that come and the wild, tumultuous beatings that trail after them forever.

.

All the sounds of the living beings and inanimate things, and all the voices and all the noises of the night I have heard in my wistful vigil.

I have heard the moans of him who bewails a thing that is dead and the sighs of him who tries to smother a thing that will not die ;

I have heard the stifled sobs of the one who weeps with his head under the coarse blanket, and the whisperings of the one who prays with his forehead on the hard, cold stone of the floor ;

I have heard him who laughs the shrill, sinister laugh of folly at the horror rampant on the yellow wall and at the red eyes of the nightmare glaring through the iron bars ;

I have heard in the sudden icy silence him who coughs a dry, ringing cough, and wished madly that his throat would not rattle so and that he would not spit on the floor, for no sound was more atrocious than that of his sputum upon the floor ;

I have heard him who swears fearsome oaths which I listen to in reverence and awe, for they are holier than the virgin's prayer ;

And I have heard, most terrible of all, the silence of two hundred brains all possessed by one single, relentless, unforgiving, desperate thought.

All this have I heard in the watchful night,
And the murmur of the wind beyond the
walls,
And the tolls of a distant bell,
And the woeful dirge of the rain,
And the remotest echoes of the sorrowful city,
And the terrible beatings, wild beatings, mad
beatings of the One Heart which is nearest to my
heart.

All this have I heard in the still night;
But nothing is louder, harder, drearier, might-
ier, more awful than the footsteps I hear over my
head all night.

.

Yet fearsome and terrible are all the footsteps
of men upon the earth, for they either descend or
climb.

They descend from little mounds and high peaks
and lofty altitudes, through wide roads and narrow
paths, down noble marble stairs and creaky stairs
of wood — and some go down to the cellar, and
some to the grave, and some down to the pits of
shame and infamy, and still some to the glory of
an unfathomable abyss where there is nothing but
the staring white, stony eyeballs of Destiny.

And again other footsteps climb. They climb
to life and to love, to fame, to power, to vanity, to
truth, to glory and to the scaffold — to everything
but **Freedom** and the **Ideal**.

And they all climb the same roads and the same stairs others go down; for never, since man began to think how to overcome and overpass man, have other roads and other stairs been found.

They descend and they climb, the fearful footsteps of men, and some limp, some drag, some speed, some trot, some run — they are quiet, slow, noisy, brisk, quick, feverish, mad, and most awful is their cadence to the ears of the one who stands still.

But of all the footsteps of men that either descend or climb, no footsteps are so fearsome and terrible as those that go straight on the dead level of a prison floor, from a yellow stone wall to a red iron gate.

.

All through the night he walks and he thinks. Is it more frightful because he walks and his footsteps sound hollow over my head, or because he thinks and speaks not his thoughts?

But does he think? Why should he think? Do I think? I only hear the footsteps and count them. Four steps and the wall. Four steps and the gate. But beyond? Beyond? Where goes he beyond the gate and the wall?

He goes not beyond. His thought breaks there on the iron gate. Perhaps it breaks like a wave of rage, perhaps like a sudden flow of hope, but it always returns to beat the wall like a billow of helplessness and despair.

He walks to and fro within the narrow whirl-pit of this ever storming and furious thought. Only one thought — constant, fixed, immovable, sinister, without power and without voice.

A thought of madness, frenzy, agony and despair, a hell-brewed thought, for it is a natural thought. All things natural are things impossible while there are jails in the world — bread, work, happiness, peace, love.

But he thinks not of this. As he walks he thinks of the most superhuman, the most unattainable, the most impossible thing in the world:

He thinks of a small brass key that turns just half around and throws open the red iron gate.

.

That is all the Walker thinks, as he walks throughout the night.

And that is what two hundred minds drowned in the darkness and the silence of the night think, and that is also what I think.

Wonderful is the supreme wisdom of the jail that makes all think the same thought. Marvelous is the providence of the law that equalizes all, even in mind and sentiment. Fallen is the last barrier of privilege, the aristocracy of the intellect. The democracy of reason has leveled all the two hundred minds to the common surface of the same thought.

I, who have never killed, think like a murderer;

I, who have never stolen, reason like a thief;

I think, reason, wish, hope, doubt, wait like the hired assassin, the embezzler, the forger, the counterfeiter, the incestuous, the raper, the drunkard, the prostitute, the pimp, I, I who used to think of love and life and flowers and song and beauty and the ideal.

A little key, a little key as little as my little finger, a little key of shining brass.

All my ideas, my thoughts, my dreams are congealed in a little key of shiny brass.

All my brain, all my soul, all the suddenly surging latent powers of my deepest life are in the pocket of a white-haired man dressed in blue.

He is great, powerful, formidable, the man with the white hair, for he has in his pocket the mighty talisman which makes one man cry, and one man pray, and one laugh, and one cough, and one walk, and all keep awake and listen and think the same maddening thought.

Greater than all men is the man with the white hair and the small brass key, for no other man in the world could compel two hundred men to think for so long the same thought. Surely when the light breaks I will write a hymn unto him which shall hail him greater than Mohammed and Arbues and Torquemada and Mesmer, and all the other masters of other men's thoughts. I shall call him Almighty, for he holds everything of all and of me in a little brass key in his pocket.

Everything of me he holds but the branding iron of contempt and the claymore of hatred for the monstrous cabala that can make the apostle and the murderer, the poet and the procurer, think of the same gate, the same key and the same exit on the different sunlit highways of life.

.

My brother, do not walk any more.

It is wrong to walk on a grave. It is a sacrilege to walk four steps from the headstone to the foot and four steps from the foot to the headstone.

If you stop walking, my brother, no longer will this be a grave, for you will give me back my mind that is chained to your feet and the right to think my own thoughts.

I implore you, my brother, for I am weary of the long vigil, weary of counting your steps, and heavy with sleep.

Stop, rest, sleep, my brother, for the dawn is well nigh and it is not the key alone that can throw open the gate.

INTERMEZZO

Let us have music. Play the phonograph.
Put on a record of a racing jazz.
Dance. Move. Sing with the crazy strain.
Dance. Sing. I'm going outside to watch the
moon.

The moon is in the east, low in the east.
The nicotiana grows beside the door.
Dance, young singing people,
while I am outside,
watching the moon,
smelling the nicotiana that grows beside the door.

Far in the east,
across the lake, so motionless, so black,
is the bordering forest.
The forest is a fringe of jet around the shimmering
silk of the lake.
Above the line of trees is a vast black cloud with an
upper fringe of burnished gold — the gold of
the rising moon.

I am going outside to watch the moon
and to smell the nicotiana that grows beside the
door.

I knew a lady who lived by night —
and soft was the music of long ago —
I knew a lady whose presence was the burnished gold
 of moonlit clouds,
or the scent of nicotiana —
the flower that opens only at the coming of the
 moon.

Dance, young singing people.
Dance away your singing youth.
I remember the music of long ago;
and, though time is as black as a moonless murk,
I cannot but remember the lady who lived by night,
like the burnished gold of the clouds,
like the scent of nicotiana.

VIGIL

Again they are singing about the Christ.
It is another year that is gone.
Out in the streets they are singing about the Christ.
Slowly the snow is descending.
Silently and straightly the snowflakes descend.
The snowflakes are oblivious white nuns.
The night is a vast, unlighted church
swarming with oblivious white nuns
and resounding with songs about the Christ.
The night is a vast, unlighted church.

Hours ago, the many came
with many bundles in their arms.
They hid the bundles mysteriously
and hung up holly in the windows.
I, in the spirit of bringing things,
brought to my cat a globe of goldfish.
I hid the globe as mysteriously
as the many hid their many bundles.

The snowflakes are oblivious white nuns with folded
arms. They are oblivious of things that are
hidden away. They are oblivious of the wreaths
of holly. They come to purge. They come in
speechless finality.
It is another year that is gone.

How many years have passed since the first of our
love?
How many times did we listen while they sang about
the Christ?
How many times have I listened alone for the carols?
This is another year that I have listened alone.

At dawn, when the carols shall have ceased, the
merry bells of the sleighs will begin to sound.
At dawn, perhaps, there will be a merry sunlight.
The wreaths of holly will glimmer. I shall bring
from hiding the globe of goldfish. I shall place
the globe in the sunlight. Buttons shall catch

the fish for his morning meal. I shall watch
them flash as they scurry before his paw.
At dawn, the many will bring from hiding their many
bundles. They will bring them mysteriously.
At dawn, the world will be a huddle of white nuns
all silent — obviously silent,
as for years
we have been.

EN ROUTE

See the dead doe on the baggage truck.
See the blood that drips from the mouth.
See the protruding tongue
foul with clotted blood.
The tongue has tasted the tongue of a lover.

Beside her lover
she strolled from the woods.
She came to drink.
From the yellow woods
to the yellow light,
while the sun was low,
she came to drink
at the brook in the meadow.
She heard no sound
save that of the brook
or that of the tread of her lover.

Beside her lover she wandered across the plain.
Beneath a morning sky
of white
and blue
and gold,
she wandered across the windy, sunny expanse of
tawn.
She heard no sound
save that of the wind
or that of the tread of her lover.

She came from the wide, wild north.
Somebody wanted to kill.

TO A WEAKLING

Do not speak of faith in me.
Do not pour out your heart upon me, only to soil me
with what you think I am.
Do not crown me king of your limitations.
Do not chatter about understandings.
Do not mention lasting friendship.
Do not speak.
I am striving to hear each note of the swallows
swooping through the door of the barn.
I am striving to hear each whine of the autumn winds
sidling about the eaves.

I am longing to tell you that what I am is likely
to cause in you a shudder;
that what I am is likely to silence you;
that I have done all things;
and that I am proud —
serenely proud —
of having no limitations.
Fool, could I silence you
by telling you these things?

COMMUNION

Last night I came alone across the January snows.
Pausing in the soundless midnight, I looked upon the
stars.

The stars were flashing. Millions of stars were flash-
ing in the swarthy, boundless blue —
millions of miles away,
millions of miles apart —
and no one stood beside me,
and no one beneath the stars awaited my approach.
I murmured —“ I am glad that no one stands at my
elbow.

I am glad that what I have craved is buried in the
snows.

I am glad that all my clamorings are as quiet as the
winds.

I am glad that all whom I have loved are as distant
as the stars.

Men bind themselves with their right hands, and,
with their left hands, tug at the bonds.

Men huddle together like ants that they may soar
like eagles.

They are buried in the snows.

They are as distant as the stars."

AFTER TSCHAIKOWSKY

Hurry. The hardened face of the hardened year is
drawn and is set by a fearful thought. The
haze deceives. It is merciful.

Hurry. The days shall come when the year will
weep obliviously.

The days of oblivious weeping will come too
soon, and in those days the year shall not hear
you above its sobs.

Hurry. The days are approaching when nothing
but memories shall be left. The passive days
succeeding the days of weeping, will shimmer
with ghosts of all that shall be dead, and the
ghosts will wander about by the light of the
helpless sun.

When the long floods shall have burst,
it will be too late to speak.

When the passing storms shall have left the meadows
torn and fallow,

it will be too late for words.

Hurry. The sun is already dim in the woes that are
weaving in the west. It is making its last ap-
peal.

I wait. Except the rustle of laboring squirrels,
there is no sound in the ragged woods. The
birds have gone, forgetting, singing into an-
other warmth.

Belated crows are flapping away through the yellow
hush.

The mountains are confused by the weaving woes
of the skies.

As the days go by, I watch the tawn creep over the
hillsides.

The leaves are scrawny. Like the skins of old
women, the leaves are spotted with brown. The
veins of the leaves are coarse.

It is all over with all the flowers.

They grew where they would and they are dying.

They were placed by hands and they are dying.

The clover has long persisted, but now it succumbs.

It is withered. It adds to the tawn of the land-
scape.

I wait. But I do not care.

Some are whispering of changes.

Some are turning away their faces.
Some are thinking of other things.
Some are gathering what is left.

I wait. The pleading sunlight is calling together the
hilltops.

It entreats them to be compassionate.

At times I think you will soon return.

The pure blue darkness purges the past. Every
night the past is absolved at the priestly ap-
proach of the pure white moon.

At times I think you will never return.

I wait. But I do not care.

LOCAL BOYS AND GIRLS
SMALL TOWN STUFF

A panther sprang at the feet
Of the young deer in the grey wood.
It was the lady who had sworn
To love him,
That rose, wraithlike
From the flow of his blood.
He swooned with her devotions.

There was never one
More jolly and boyish
Than he was, in the great beginning.
Once his slippers were fastened
With domesticity,
He settled down
Like a worn jaguar
Weary with staring through bars.
The caresses that were poured
Over his person
Staled on him.
Love had grown rancid.
Have you emptied the garbage
John?

Prometheus fire
Never can worship
The smell of hams and hocks
Issuing from the smokehouse.
The odours of the street
Hold enticements
That bear entertaining.
There is at least
The tincture of virility
Present.

SALUTATIONS TO A MOUSE

If a mouse makes a nest
Of one's written words,
Is there else to do but accept
The flattery?
I have deemed it wise to do so.
I have thanked him
Sufficiently
As he scurried in and out
Of the room.
He has faced the winter
With a nest of my words.
I did not suspect them
Of such worth against the cold.

SYNTHESIZED PERFUMES AND ESSENCES

Morning comes with such rapidity, purple plum hanging on sensuous boughs over my head, sweeping my shoulders, grazing my cheek, that I wonder one ever thinks of the going of evening.

I never talk of evening save to say of it, it is another kind of light.

Dark holes called doorways are for me only as places to go into where one watches the light of night from them.

Danse l'Aigle — L'homme Rouge. As we watched him swinging and descending, we saw the dew of multiple benefactions dropping from his wings. In his beak he held fragments of the morning gathered from the lips of the red cliff nearest the sun of dawn.

How splendid he is, the lady from the fiord remarked. I stroked his wings and felt the warmth of the centuries on my hands.

It emphasized our infancy in point of time. It emphasized our vacuity in point of experience.

There is room on the housetops for love. There is room over the housetops for the moon to rise and resume the old eloquence.

If there is anything for lovers in the rising of the moon, they will be welcome to the supposition. The sky has time for nothing but approval, of all things, that are trivial.

Against the long thin sky of our wilfulness, there hangs the marriage pear. If brown hands wish to make a syrinx out of olive boughs,

What is the objection? The wood is oiled for music. Someone will be in love with someone, despite a certain prejudice.

The weevil falls to dust with every suit of clothes. If the gem is hard, it is rather sure of retaining its accustomed radiance.

Water running beside my bed. The brook brought to my bedside.

The little pool, when the tide is out. Anemones and crabs at home.

Violet and orange. Indian orange. Roseate, ashy gold.

Seaweeds made of torments rolling out of brown eyes.

Froth from the tossed wave. My bedlinen shall be made of it.

The window nearest my bed shall be made of forsaken cusps of the moon.

I shall sleep, with an orange, a lemon, and an avocado on a little table.

A silver plate with the red seeds of the pomegranate
divested of their juices. A pampas plume shall
wave with the breath of nightingales from a distant
orchard. I think I could care for such a
sleep. For once, at least.

FISHMONGER

I have taken scales from off
The cheeks of the moon.
I have made fins from bluejays' wings,
I have made eyes from damsons in the shadow.
I have taken flushes from the peachlips in the sun.
From all these I have made a fish of heaven for you,
Set it swimming on a young October sky.
I sit on the bank of the stream and watch
The grasses in amazement
As they turn to ashy gold.
Are the fishes from the rainbow
Still beautiful to you,
For whom they are made,
For whom I have set them,
Swimming ?

THE FLATTERERS

I

The cactus has grown young leaves
One and a half inches long

Since I came to live with it.
Its branches are like the claws of crabs
In a bed of seaweed.
Young rosehued shoots are coming
From the new green leaves.
I have divined their desires.
They would make huge boughs
Of soft green for you and me
To sit under,
And tell each other of ourselves
And of the world.

II

Outside the wall of this room,
The young tamerisk tree waves
Its feathery grey branches in the wind.
It has sent its coraldust blossoms to the ground.
They were like wafts of smoke from a tepee
In the morning just before the sun
Reaches the desert.
I sat one evening in the moonlight,
Under the tamerisk tree,
And listened to songs from the lips
Of a Mexican boy.
He told me afterward in broken English
The meaning of these songs.
I could have told him a richer meaning.

I could have told him of your presence
Inside the wall of this room.
I told him nothing of your presence.
It is enough the cactus and the tamerisk
are knowing,
And you, and I.

EVENING QUANDARY

There is water flowing
From the padre's garden.

There is water flowing
Under the solid gate.

There is water flowing
From the keyhole.

There is water flowing,
Wat —er,

Drip, drip, drip, drip,
From the padre's garden.

It is not raining.
The stars are all laughing.

There is water flowing,
From the padre's garden.

Ten o'clock in the evening,
From the keyhole.
Drip, drip, drip, drip, drip.

If it had rained today,
I would say it is the patter of sky feet
In the padre's garden.

There is water flowing,
From the padre's garden —
Everywhere.

KYSEN

A FRIEZE

I

The gods have taken a child from the womb of a dead lady.

The father has sacrificed five bullocks for the child in the womb during three days following the intense heat.

Twenty stores of grain have been turned out along the roads for the poor, and forty wells have been sunk between Wul and Tanaio.

The rains have fallen for a day upon the ashes of the mother, but the infant Kysen thrives upon the black breasts of a Nubian, whose first-born was thrown from the rock.

II

In the center of the circular pool before the house of Kysen's father, facing the alley of poplars and the little valley beyond, stands a tiny girl-child of marble holding in her hands a wounded bird.

Sometimes the sun robes it in a transparent gown of silver, reflected from the basin at its feet.

The sculptor Tamaporis modelled it from Kysen's very self, and she, who is forbidden to do so because she is stately and silent in her father's house, longs to take the child down from its pedestal and question it regarding their future.

But at night she goes out from the house in her tunic of shimmery white, with the fringe of peacock colored silk, and wading through the pool she climbs upon the rim of the basin and kisses the little limbs and the hands, for the sake of all the things she does not wish to remember.

III

Every morning for seven mornings, Kysen has risen from her chocolate, taken behind the lattice of her verandah, and binding her hair in a knot over her brow and donning her double chiton of pale blue embroidered with gold and modena phoenixes, has gone among the rose-bushes to watch for the first bud.

It is understood that until the labors of the Spring have borne this fruit, her lover may not return: This morning on the smallest bush three steps from the olive tree a spot of red no larger than a jewel pushed out of the green cloak, and Kysen

has gone to the East window at the top of her house, spreading her arms in welcome. At night a rocket will be sent up from the terrace.

IV

When Kysen awakes in the night and sees the big wings of the big window open beside her bed she shudders, for she imagines they are the arms of a monster come to carry her away.

And when she hears the sound of the dry branches in the wind outside she imagines it is the voice of the monster calling her to come.

Then she turns to awaken her lover.

But if he is not there she throws back the purple rugs and the white covers of the bed and goes to the chamber where the paroquets hang, and lifting the black silk night-shade with the pink monogram, she chatters to them until she falls asleep in her chair.

V

When the red cat is ill it is as though the sea has escaped through a hole in one of the continents and the maid whose business it is to care for it stands before the shrine of Ptah, trying to pull her fingers out of their sockets.

All the doors of the house close more noisily than usual and the gold-fish die before they can be eaten.

But Kysen has prepared for this and in a far chamber of the house she has ordered a table to be laden with twenty kinds of fruit and the rarest wines from each province, delicate tongues from the baby calves, and the skins of quails roasted between honey.

When her friends are assembled the doors are locked and Kysen feasts and makes merry until the red cat is well.

VI

Once a year at dawn the priest comes from the temple to the house of Kysen.

He is tall and his robe is of apple-green with a yellow band around the ankles and he has been chosen because he has the longest beard of all the young men.

He walks back and forth in front of the door, watching the casement of her sleeping apartment.

As soon as it is closed he enters and pressing his lips upon the clasps of her feet and upon her hair, he demands the name of her lover.

She pouts and refuses to answer, and though she

would keep him longer pleading with her, he goes away.

Kysen watches the reflection of the window upon the round pounce-box of gold upon her table, and calling the score and five of maids she orders them to bar the doors and windows, to wear soiled linen and never to admit anyone again.

As for herself she has a bed of coarse sand made in her room and sleeps upon it until her skin stings with pain and is so rough that it must be embrocated for thirty-one days before her lover is allowed to return.

VII

On the tenth day after the birth of a child in her household Kysen prays for the things she can never have:

“Father of Smiles, Forgiver, I have read in a crimson doe-skin book with silver sprays and an orange enamel clasp, of a bird in Africa which the Tunisians call *bu-habibi*, meaning the bird of laughter and which eats grain from the tongue without being trained.

“In the palace of the *Zuwya Sheik*, who is said to be always on horseback shaded by a green umbrella, bearing a falcon on a tiny cushion and followed by a greyhound, there is a shawl of

silk like sunset passing through the branches of the pine.

“Give me both of these, Father, and let thy daughter have many children, but let them be born from my kisses as sound is born from the wind and let them come into the world fully clothed in tunics of blue.”

VIII

Today there passed along the road ten men with iron collars about their necks and chains between them, and either side a file of young soldiers.

Kysen, without even waiting for the completion of her toilet and with her hair flowing behind her like a fan of bronze, ran out of the house and addressed the dark-skinned captain of the soldiers: “Give these men to me that I may free them! Are they barbarians or Lydians that you put iron weights upon their necks and fasten them together with chains?”

And the captain answered: “Kysen of the province of Wul, each of them has committed a murder by binding the hair of a maiden about her throat.”

And Kysen replied: “It is a thing that has happened since the beginning of the world, and men

know that none but the gods can take life, for none but they can give it. The gods have brought death to the ten maidens by making these youths their instruments.”

Hearing Kysen speak thus the soldiers nodded to each other as though they had gained a new knowledge, and the men in chains drew themselves up and laughed.

But the captain ordered the column to go on, and because she could not prevail Kysen has placed a man upon the road to herald the approach of misery caused by the law.

She will hide her head beneath four thicknesses of ostrich down and fill her ears with scented gums in order not to know the sound of injustice.

IX

The little girl from the village whose parents gave her all the tasks to do in order that they might not lose a moment from their wine, has been brought into the house of Kysen to learn the art of laughter.

When the offenses of the child, whose name is called Dikai, have filled the red sheet kept by the secretaries, Kysen goes into the chamber of porphyry in which seven candles are kept burning day and night, and administers punishment

to herself for the acts of Dikai, being careful that no member of the household should see the manner of her punishment.

When she has finished she gathers the tears which she has shed in a silver bowl, and pours them into the closed amphora upon which is written, "The Dowry of Dikai." Then summoning the maids she ordered forty lashes to be administered to the lintels of the great south door, and instructs them to give the child greater freedom than before, and to obey her in all her desires.

X

At the dance of the Cow, which is sacred to the poor, Kysen wears the calyx of a poppy inverted, and her limbs are bound with cords woven of the tongues of serpents dried upon weights and treated with oil.

Her mask is made of ivory scraped thinner than the fibers of an orange, and two children carry the crystal alms-bowl, containing the figures of boys modelled in wax of Hymettus.

Her hair is powdered with the ashes of young men who have died for her love.

When she returns to her house, before laying the garments away she will press her lips upon all the soiled places for the sake of the gentle fingers of beggars.

AFRICAN NIGHTS

TIRED

I am tired of work; I am tired of building up somebody else's civilization.

Let us take a rest, M'Lissy Jane.

I will go down to the Last Chance Saloon, drink a gallon or two of gin, shoot a game or two of dice and sleep the rest of the night on one of Mike's barrels.

You will let the old shanty go to rot, the white people's clothes turn to dust, and the Calvary Baptist Church sink to the bottomless pit.

You will spend your days forgetting you married me and your nights hunting the warm gin Mike serves the ladies in the rear of the Last Chance Saloon.

Throw the children into the river; civilization has given us too many. It is better to die than it is to grow up and find out that you are colored.

Pluck the stars out of the heavens. The stars mark our destiny. The stars marked my destiny.

I am tired of civilization.

AUNT HANNAH JACKSON

Despite her sixty years Aunt Hannah Jackson rubs on other people's clothes.

Time has played havoc with her eyes and turned to gray her parched hair.

But her tongue is nimble as she talks to herself.

All day she talks to herself about her neighbors and her friends and the man she loved.

Yes, Aunt Hannah Jackson loved even as you and I and Wun Hop Sing.

"He was a good man," she says, "but a fool."

"So am I a fool and Mrs. Lee a fool and this Mrs. Goldstein that I work for a fool."

"All of us are fools."

For rubbing on other people's clothes Aunt Hannah Jackson gets a dollar and fifty cents a day and a worn out dress on Christmas.

For talking to herself Aunt Hannah Jackson gets a smile as we call her a good natured fool.

AUNT JANE ALLEN

State Street is lonely to-day. Aunt Jane Allen has driven her chariot to Heaven.

I remember how she hobbled along, a little woman, parched of skin, brown as the leather of a satchel

and with eyes that had scanned eighty years of life.

Have those who bore her dust to the last resting place buried with her the basket of aprons she went up and down State Street trying to sell?

Have those who bore her dust to the last resting place buried with her the gentle word Son that she gave to each of the seed of Ethiopia?

THE BARBER

I wield the razor, sling hot towels and talk.

My daily newspaper is the racing chart and my pastime making bets on fleet-footed horses.

Whatever is left from betting I divide with my wife and a yellow woman who lives in an apartment on Wabash Avenue.

(Poor Wife! She gets very little.)

I love gay clothes, a good supply of Fatimas and the fire in gin and whiskey.

I love life. Who doesn't?

THE DRUNKARD

I had a wife, but she is gone. She left me a week ago. God bless her!

I married another in the rear of Mike's saloon. It was a gallon jug of the reddest liquor that ever

burned the throat of man. I will be true to my new wife. You can have the other.

THE BANJO PLAYER

There is music in me, the music of a peasant people.

I wander through the levee, picking my banjo and singing my songs of the cabin and the field. At the Last Chance Saloon I am as welcome as the violets in March; there is always food and drink for me there, and the dimes of those who love honest music. Behind the railroad tracks the little children clap their hands and love me as they love Kris Kringle.

But I fear that I am a failure. Last night a woman called me a troubadour. What is a troubadour?

THE MINISTER

I mastered pastoral theology, the Greek of the Apostles, and all the difficult subjects in a minister's curriculum.

I was as learned as any in this country when the Bishop ordained me.

And I went to preside over Mount Moriah, largest flock in the Conference.

I preached the Word as I felt it, I visited the sick and dying and comforted the afflicted in spirit.

I loved my work because I loved my God.

But I lost my charge to Sam Jenkins, who has not been to school four years in his life.

I lost my charge because I could not make my congregation shout.

And my dollar money was small, very small.

Sam Jenkins can tear a Bible to tatters and his congregation destroys the pews with their shouting and stamping.

Sam Jenkins leads in the gift of raising dollar money.

Such is religion.

THE SCARLET WOMAN

Once I was good like the Virgin Mary and the Minister's wife.

My father worked for Mr. Pullman and white people's tips ; but he died two days after his insurance expired.

I had nothing, so I had to go to work.

All the stock I had was a white girl's education and a face that enchanted the men of both races.

Starvation danced with me.

So when Big Lizzie, who kept a house for white men, came to me with tales of fortune that I could

reap from the sale of my virtue I bowed my head
to Vice.

Now I can drink more gin than any man for
miles around.

Gin is better than all the water in Lethe.

DOROTHY

I. HER EYES

Her eyes hold black whips —
 dart of a whip
 lashing, nay, flicking,
 nay, merely caressing
 the hide of a heart —
and a broncho tears through canyons —
 walls reverberating,
 sluggish streams
 shaken to rapids and torrents,
 storm destroying
 silence and solitude!

Her eyes throw black lariats —
 one for his head,
 one for his heels —
and the beast lies vanquished —
 walls still,
 streams still —
 except for a tarn,
 or is it a pool,
 or is it a whirlpool
 twitching with memory?

II. HER HAIR

Her hair
is a tent
 held down by two pegs —
 ears, very likely —
where two gypsies —
 lips, dull folk call them —
read your soul away:
one promising something,
the other stealing it.

 If the pegs would let go —
 why is it they're hidden?
and the tent
 blow away — drop away —
like a wig — or a nest —
 maybe
you'd escape
paying coin
to gypsies —
 maybe —

III. HER HANDS

Blue veins
 of morning glories —
blue veins
 of clouds —

blue veins
 bring deep-toned silence
 after a storm.

White horns
 of morning glories —
white flutes
 of clouds —
sextettes hold silence fast,
 cup it for aye.

Could I
 blow morning glories —
could I
 lip clouds —

I'd sound the silence
 her hands bring to me.

Had I
 the yester sun —

had I
 the morrow's —
brush them like cymbals,
 I'd then sound the noise.

IV. HER BODY

Her body gleams
like an altar candle —
white in the dark —
and modulates

to voluptuous bronze —
bronze of a sea —
under the flame.

GRASSES

Who
would decry
instruments —
when grasses,
ever so fragile,
provide strings
stout enough for
insect moods
to glide up and down
in glissandos
of toes along wires
or finger-tips on zithers —
though
the mere sounds
be theirs, not ours —
theirs, not ours,
the first inspiration —
discord
without resolution —
who
would decry
being loved,

when even such tinkling
comes of the loving?

DUST

We are molecules —
whose fate it is to quarrel —
who knows why?
It isn't when we're underfoot —
it's when we're in the air —
two of us after one air-hole!
We don't do it —
we like being still —
it's the wind does it!
Do lovers know why?

INDIAN SUMMER

What was the tune you heard on the way
that you must dawdle here,
cut a reed, like any truant,
cut crooked holes in the reed,
and dabble with burbling phrases
which can only tremble and halt
no matter how fearfully carefully you blow?
The tune you heard didn't limp?
Time, you're a dunce.

My word on it —
you could have
breathed echo when the air was near —
now it's a wraith
beyond even tiny embodiment!
That amorphous haze,
arpeggic fall of those leaves,
glint of that bird — or was it a squirrel? —
(had it been a rat it would have bitten you!)
they ought to preach your heedlessness,
no man can essay a pavanne
with his phrases at variance —
it *is* a pavanne, don't deny it!
And why propose a pavanne
when nobody dances pavannes,
and why ask a flute
to mimic the tone of a spinet?
Dear dunce —
your tune begins to sound feminine —
go away —
the phrases are exquisite daggers —
move along, move along:
we have all sought the same lady twice!

PHALLIC

Hail, steel
spike of a river,

bending and straightening,
forcing and twisting,
 driving your way
down the bowels of
 hills and mountains,
bending them back on all sides,
breaking them open,
tearing up children,
 stones strewn everywhere! —

Your soft, clear look with its
 stone-white thought —
hail, crooked grandmother,
humped on a boulder,
eyeing your daughters,
heedless of thought
from heeding their reckless,
 stone-smooth,
shell-tinted offspring —
none old enough
to think as you do —
hail to your look as it lights
 still softer
on the filthy (some would say)
 little boys
digging their way
down the mud of its banks!

INITIALS

He goes along,
in his thin flesh,
narrow bones,
slow blood,
old hat,
old clothes,
old shoes,
singing for love, battling for love.

He will go down,
in thinner flesh,
narrower bones,
slower blood,
older hat,
older clothes,
older shoes,
battling for love, dying for love.

He will be put away,
in a thin box,
down a narrow slit
of the old earth,
growing for love, rising for love:
his initials carved
on a thin seed,
narrow seed,
slow seed,
the carving as slow

as he was slow,
carving his K on a song.

POETRY

Ladislaw the critic
is five feet six inches high,
which means
that his eyes
are five feet two inches
from the ground,
which means,
if you read him your poem,
and his eyes lift to five feet
and a trifle more than two inches,
what you have done
is Poetry —
should his eyes remain
at five feet two inches,
you have perpetrated prose,
and do his eyes stoop
— which Heaven forbid! —
the least trifle below
five feet two inches,
you
are an unspeakable adjective,

THE DANIEL JAZZ

Inscribed to Isadora Bennett

Let the singer train the audience to roar like lions, and to join in the refrain:—"Go chain the lions down," before he begins to lead them in this jazz.

Darius the Mede was a king and a wonder. *Beginning with a strain of Dixie.*

His eye was proud, and his voice was thunder.

He kept bad lions in a monstrous den.

He fed up the lions on Christian men.

Daniel was the chief hired man of the land. *With a touch of Alexander's ragtime band.*

He stirred up the jazz in the palace band.

He whitewashed the cellar. He shovelled in the coal.

And Daniel kept a-praying:—"Lord save my soul."

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Daniel was the butler, swagger and swell.

He ran up stairs. He answered the bell.

And *he* would let in whoever came a-calling:—

Saints so holy, scamps so appalling.

"Old man Ahab leaves his card.

Elisha and the bears are a-waiting in the yard.

Here comes Pharo and his snakes a-calling.

Here comes Cain and his wife a-calling—

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego for tea.

Here comes Jonah and the whale, and the *sea*.

Here comes St. Peter and his fishing pole.

Here comes Judas and his silver a-calling.

Here comes old Beelzebub a-calling."

And Daniel kept a-praying:—"Lord save my soul."

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Daniel kept a-praying:—"Lord save my soul."

His sweetheart and his mother were Christian and meek.

They washed and ironed for Darius every week.

One Thursday he met them at the door:—

Paid them as usual, but acted sore.

He said:—"Your Daniel is a dead little pigeon.

He's a good hard worker, but he talks religion."

And the Lord said to Gabriel: —

“Go chain the lions down,
Go chain the lions down.
Go chain the lions down.
Go chain the lions down.”

*The audience
sings this with
the leader, to
the old negro
tune.*

And Gabriel chained the lions,
And Gabriel chained the lions,
And Gabriel chained the lions,
And Daniel got out of the den,
And Daniel got out of the den,
And Daniel got out of the den.

And Darius said: —“You’re a Christian child,
Darius said: —“You’re a Christian child,
Darius said: —“You’re a Christian child,”
And gave him his job again,
And gave him his job again,
And gave him his job again.

WHIMSEYS

KALAMAZOO

Once, in the city of Kalamazoo,
The gods went walking, two and two,

With the friendly phoenix, the stars of Orion,
The speaking pony and singing lion.
For in Kalamazoo in a cottage apart
Lived the girl with the innocent heart.

Thenceforth the city of Kalamazoo
Was the envied intimate chum of the sun.
He rose from a cave by the principal street.
The lions sang, the dawn-horns blew,
And the ponies danced on silver feet.
He hurled his clouds of love around;
Deathless colors of his old heart
Draped the houses, dyed the ground.
O shrine of the wide young Yankee land,
Incense city of Kalamazoo,
That held, in the midnight, the priceless sun
As a jeweller holds an opal in hand!

From the awkward city of Oshkosh came
Love the bully, no whip shall tame,
Bringing his gang of sinners bold.
And I was the least of his Oshkosh men;
But none were reticent, none were old.
And we joined the singing Phoenix then,
And shook the lilies of Kalamazoo
All for one hidden butterfly.
Bulls of glory, in cars of war
We charged the boulevards, proud to die
For her ribbon sailing there on high.

Our blood set gutters all aflame
Where the sun slept without any shame
Cold rock till he must rise again.
She made great poets of wolf-eyed men —
The dear queen-bee of Kalamazoo,
With her crystal wings, and her honey heart.
We fought for her favors a year and a day.
(O the bones of the dead, the Oshkosh dead,
That were scattered along her pathway red!)
And then, in her harum-scarum way,
She left with a passing traveller-man —
With a singing Irishman
Went to Japan.

.
Why do the lean hyenas glare
Where the glory of Artemis had begun —
Of Atalanta, Joan of Arc,
Lorna Doone, Rosy O'Grady,
And Orphant Annie, all in one?
Who burned this city of Kalamazoo
Till nothing was left but a ribbon or two —
One scorched phoenix that mourned in the dew,
Acres of ashes, a junk-man's cart,
A torn-up letter, a dancing shoe,
(And the bones of the valiant dead)?
Who burned this city of Kalamazoo,
Love-town, Troy-town Kalamazoo?

A harum-scarum innocent heart.

DAVY JONES' DOOR-BELL

*A Chant for Boys with Manly Voices
(Every line sung one step deeper than the line pre-
ceding)*

Any sky-bird sings,
 Ring, ring!
Any church-chime rings,
 Dong ding!
Any cannon says,
 Boom bang!
Any whirlwind says,
 Whing whang!
The bell-buoy hums and roars,
 Ding dong!
And way down deep,
Where fishes throng,
By Davy Jones' big deep-sea door,
Shaking the ocean's flowery floor,
His door-bell booms
 Dong dong,
 Dong dong,
Deep, deep down,
 Clang boom,
 Boom dong.

THE CONSCIENTIOUS DEACON

(A song to be syncopated as you please)

Black cats, grey cats, green cats miau —
Chasing the deacon who stole the cow.

He runs and tumbles, he tumbles and runs.
He sees big white men with dogs and guns.

He falls down flat. He turns to stare —
No cats, no dogs, and no men there.

But black shadows, grey shadows, green shadows
come.
The wind says, "Miau!" and the rain says,
"Hum!"

He goes straight home. He dreams all night.
He howls. He puts his wife in a fright.

Black devils, grey devils, green devils shine —
Yes, by Sambo,
And the fire looks fine!
Cat devils, dog devils, cow devils grin —
Yes, by Sambo,
And the fire rolls in.

And so, next day, to avoid the worst —
He takes that cow
Where he found her first.

THE HORRID VOICE OF SCIENCE

“ There’s machinery in the butterfly;
There’s a mainspring to the bee;
There’s hydraulics to a daisy,
And contraptions to a tree.

“ If we could see the birdie
That makes the chirping sound
With x-ray, scientific eyes,
We could see the wheels go round.”

*And I hope all men
Who think like this
Will soon lie
Underground.*

MY LADY IS COMPARED TO A YOUNG TREE

When I see a young tree
In its white beginning,
With white leaves

And white buds
Barely tipped with green,
In the April weather,
In the weeping sunshine —
Then I see my lady,
My democratic queen,
Standing free and equal
With the youngest woodland sapling
Swaying, singing in the wind,
Delicate and white:
Soul so near to blossom,
Fragile, strong as death;
A kiss from far-off Eden,
A flash of Judgment's trumpet —
April's breath.

STUDENTS

1

She sweeps in like the moon goddess,
and she has never studied
her lessons;
and when I flunk her
I feel that I am flunking Diana.

2

I have great faith in this boy —
he makes me think of mountains.
Every now and then
he looms in the rear of the room
like a peak in the Andes:
but how would you like to teach
a peak in the Andes?

3

There are some who turn my class-room
into a morgue,
and I find this hard;
but he turns my class-room
into a rathskeller
with his face and his talk and his ways.
Therefore I prize him.

4

She has a discontented face
until she smiles.
Perhaps she would like to smile all the time,
and thinks I will not permit it.

5

He has a certain look in his eye —
a look I have seen before.
All men of one idea
have this look ;
they go to the stake,
to the torture-chamber,
with this in their eye.
I know what the boy's idea is,
and I live in fear
that others may discover it, and for it
somehow crucify him.

6

Sometimes I have nervous moments —
there is a girl who looks at me strangely
as much as to say,
You are a young man,
and I am a young woman,
and what are you going to do about it?
And I look at her as much as to say,

I am going to keep the teacher's desk between us,
my dear,
as long as I can.

7

There is a smell not of the city about him,
as though his pockets were stuffed
with chestnuts, or apples,
or as though he had been working
in hay or straw;
and he smells faintly of animals, too,
of dogs and of horses;
and there is a vague smell of gunpowder about him,
and a vague smell of tobacco;
and behind all these smells
is a miraculous distance
of river and field and wood,
all in the smell of out-doors.

8

She looks at me
as though I were a stone wall
between her and heaven —
whereas I try to be
a window for her,
and a door, a gate, a ladder, an elevator —
yet she will not look through,
or leap through,

or fly through,
or do anything but stare.

9

A little cherubino comes in
when the class is all over,
and says she is so sorry,
that my class is such an inspiration,
and such a queer sensation,
but ten-thirty is an early hour,
and the street-car service poor.
And I tell her softly, that in heaven
the street-car service is always poor,
but the good little angels rise up early
and get to school on time.
And she says, "O, thank you,"
so effusively.

10

The first day I didn't see her,
nor the second, nor the third,
and when at last I saw her,
I hardly noticed her.
Yet this girl has gone through a tragedy
fighting those who had to be fought,
and nursing those who needed nursing.
And you would never guess it,
except for a queer little line at her lips

and her eyes, that are blue as steel,
blue as a dagger, blue as a quiet lake.

11

To do one's best and to fail
is disaster enough;
but it is worse to remember
how one might have done more.
It is too late — he has gone;
and nothing I can do
will bring him back to me,
will give me another chance with him,
not that I think it would have mattered.

12

She needs a more exotic air to blossom in —
clash of cymbals should precede her elephant
down the street to school —
she should be black from head to toes,
wearing barbaric jewels —
and now that I think of it,
why couldn't she come through my class-room
window
on the elephant's trunk?

13

She regards me haughtily
as perhaps Mrs. Siddons
regarded the third George —

and after all, why should she not?
But I live in terror of hearing her say,
In that tragical voice of hers, some day,
Bid me, out, out, damned spot.

14

She says, If writing were like dancing,
then I could bring my dreams.
And I ask her what has lighter feet
than a dancing word?
and what speeds faster, what lasts longer
than a dance of phrases
down a page to far music?
She does not answer.

15

He is the only one who ever dared
sit on my sacred desk
and rumple my sacred hair.
Yet he is the only one
who ever cared to carry my books
and call me "Maestro" in public.
And whenever I said a clever thing
he would exclaim, "Priceless, priceless!"

16

All he sees is the dollar sign,
and he suspects me
of wasting his time.

O for some clever accountant
to compute my cash value —
for then I could write dollar signs
across the blackboard behind me,
and he would pay strict attention
and make little entries
in a little ledger.

17

She is hungry for dreams;
without them she will perish.
But I fear she turns away
from the only dream that lasts
and gives her precious youth
to the dreams that go in an hour.

18

We have given him a mask,
we parents and teachers,
and to please us
he writes moral axioms in a little book
and debates with himself continually
whether he lives the nobler life.
Nevertheless, great blood is his.
He is of the kin of Rigoletto,
Sancho Panza is his comrade,
Touchstone his uncle;
and he goes sedately down the path of pierrot
arm in arm with harlequin.

19

When our eyes meet
I go cold to my feet.
Some day I shall forget my necktie,
and on that day, proud and reproachful,
she will point her finger at me —
and the walls of my world
will tumble.

THE BLACK VIRGINITY

Baby Priests
On green sward
Yew-closed
Silk beaver
Rhythm of redemption
Fluttering of Breviaries

Fluted black silk cloaks
Hung square from shoulders
Truncated juvenility
Uniform segregation
Union in severity
Modulation
Intimidation
Pride of misapprehended preparation
Ebony statues training for immobility
Anæmic jawed
Wise saw to one another

Prettily the little ones
Gesticulate benignly upon one another in the sun
buzz —
Finger and thumb circles postulate pulpits
Profiles forsworn to Donatello

Munching tall talk vestral shop
Evangelical snobs
Uneasy dreaming
In hermetically-sealed dormitories
Not of me or you Sister Saraminta
Of no more or less
Than the fit of Pope's mitres

It is an old religion that put us in our places
Here am I in lilac print
Preposterously no less than the world flesh and devil
Having no more idea what those are
What I am
Than Baby Priests of what "He" is
or they are —
Messianic mites tripping measured latin ring-a-roses
Subjugated adolescence
Retraces loose steps to furling of Breviaries
In broiling shadows
The last with apostolic lurch
Tries for a high hung fruit
And misses
Any way it is inedible
It is always thus
In the Public Garden.

Parallel lines
An old man
Eyeing a white muslin girl's school

And all this
As pleasant as bewildering
Would not eventually meet
I am for ever bewildered
Old men are often grown greedy —
What nonsense
It is noon
And salvation's seedlings
Are headed off for the refectory.

THE DEAD

We have flowed out of ourselves
Beginning on the outside
That shrivvable skin
Where you leave off

Of infinite elastic
Walking the ceiling
Our eyelashes polish stars

Curled close in the youngest corpuscle
Of a descendant
We spit up our passions in our grand-dams

Fixing the extension of your reactions
Our shadow lengthens
In your fear

You are so old
Born in our immortality
Stuck fast as Life
In one impalpable
Omniprevalent Dimension

We are turned inside out
Your cities lie digesting in our stomachs
Street lights footle in our ocular darkness

Having swallowed your irate hungers
Satisfied before bread-breaking
To your dissolution
We splinter into Wholes
Stirring the remorse of your tomorrow
Among the refuse of your unborn centuries
In our busy ashbins
Stink the melodies
of your
So easily reducible
Adolescences

Our tissue is of that which escapes you
Birth-Breaths and orgasms
The shattering tremor of the static
The far-shore of an instant
The unsurpassable openness of the circle
Legerdemain of God

Only in the segregated angles of Lunatic Asylums
Do those who have strained to exceeding themselves
Break on our edgeless contours

The mouthed echoes of what
has exuded to our companionship
Is horrible to the ear
Of the half that is left inside them.

MASKS

Do birds sing for their mates?

My song was for one airy and shining,

Lighter than a butterfly's wings.

On the way, she would half-turn and listen.

*She fluttered solemn, occupied, yet I never knew her
airy business.*

Now that I sing of an earthly woman,

She listens wondering.

A HELEN

You looked tired,

For you came from afar,

Perhaps from Greece.

You may have been walking for ages.

You stepped slowly,

As though you carried

Some precious wine.

You stayed a moment . . .

Then vanished,

Wondering,

As if you were some one else.

GIRLS

I

Your family has moulded you.

Marks of their tools and fingers
Show about your torse and face.

Your cheeks near the mouth
Are half-frozen.

Your soul flutters
Faintly.

II

Your flesh slopes like rose-petals.
Like rose-petals
It holds and drinks in the light.

Your humid lips
Remember the mother's milk.

Yet there flutters about you a flame —
Maturing you, withering you.

III

In the cafeteria the girl moved briskly
In her imitation silk, sashed, hang-how-it-will dress;

Yet knocked constantly against the customs —
In taking her water, her sugar, her catsup.

In the street too she walked briskly,
The old purse dangling and the old hat moving
 firmly ;
Of a sudden she stopped, looked about, listened —
Struck by the city — shot — like a flying bird.

Then she took herself in hand and went on.

MYRRH

Your face called up a lily
Glowing in the dusk,
Your body the dusk-green stalk.
Your lips were parched, imploring . . .

As if they thirsted for the kiss behind the kiss,
As if they awaited disappointment.

PAIN

Her lips lie tired, discarded.
Her eyes are on the alert, as if for some mystic tryst.
Through the white limbs where desire has leaped and
 pranced

Now runs the invisible fire —

An offering to some mysterious god.

A LADY TALKING TO A POET

For a moment you felt nude and shivered.

Your social position hung near;

You threw it about you —

A garment frail and lacy.

THE TRAITOR

He knew the lady's half-mocking, half-regretful
smile,

Fluttering like one of the sweet-pea petals,

Had been fertilized by the sweat and blood of her
husband's vest-workers.

Yet his eyes resented the intrusion

Of firm matter-of-fact chins of servants.

A RICH GENTLEMAN

Your nostrils sniff the air,

Your ears stand alert:

Near you, like wolves in the forest,

Lurk other people's poverty and suffering;

And though your heart is robust —

Tough, like the cheek of a country girl,

You dare not trust it.

A PETIT BOURGEOIS

Sharp nails grow out from your fat fingers;
Over your clean-shaven lip glimmers the moustache
of a tom-cat.

Your smiles are investments at a hundred per-cent.

Yet one has only one life, one mouth, one stomach,
and can take only one woman at a time;
Also, when you were younger, before you knew,
You foolishly allowed suffering to reach your heart.
So your face sometimes contorts wistfully —
You use this sanctimoniously to deceive.

LA MORT DE PAUL VERLAINE

The few rosy cloud-splotches
In the bluish-white afternoon sky
Shed down ruddy flowers of light —
Big, capriciously shaped lilies and orchids — so
thickly
That some, held at the stems, stood as if growing
straight from the grass.
Among them he came — short, heavy, a little ragged,
With eyes and lips that had laughed much with wine;
Faintly-drunk, as if wine-vapors of the past were
hovering in his head;
Blowing his flute and dancing,

Now fast, now slow, and now stopping . . . listen-
ing . . .

An earth-flower among the light flowers.

Tired, he dropped down on the grass.

The light-flowers caressed his cheeks and his drowsy
eyes with their cloud-like coolness — piling
about him.

Did the trees understand?

The birds sang

As though it were sunrise.

DEATH

One comes to me every day —
Gentle, tactful, and of
Admirable dignity.

He is friendly though not wheedling,
He wants me to know him.
Sometimes he touches my arm,
Or even presses it impulsively.

TO A WOMAN ASLEEP IN A STREET-CAR

Woman sleeping in the car —
Strange, aloof and far —

Shall I shake you and tell you
Who you are?

Wake up and let us speak —
Till our hearts are bared to the core,
Till we are a man and a woman no more,
Till we are empty like vases that leak,
Till we droop and fall,
Till we are nothing at all.

BLACK EARTH

Openly, yes,
 With the naturalness
 Of the hippopotamus or the alligator
When it climbs out on the bank to experience the

Sun, I do these
Things which I do, which please
 No one but myself. Now I breathe and now I am
 sub-
Merged; the blemishes stand up and shout when the
 object

In view was a
Renaissance; shall I say
 The contrary? The sediment of the river which
 Encrusts my joints, makes me very gray but I am
 used

To it, it may
Remain there; do away
 With it and I am myself done away with, for the
 Patina of circumstance can but enrich what was

There to begin
With. This elephant skin

Which I inhabit, fibred over like the shell of
The coco-nut, this piece of black glass through
which no light

Can filter — cut
Into checkers by rut
Upon rut of unpreventable experience —
It is a manual for the peanut-tongued and the

Hairy toed. Black
But beautiful, my back
Is full of the history of power. Of power?
What
Is powerful and what is not? My soul shall
never

Be cut into
By a wooden spear; through-
Out childhood to the present time, the unity of
Life and death has been expressed by the circum-
ference

Described by my
Trunk; nevertheless, I
Perceive feats of strength to be inexplicable after
All; and I am on my guard; external poise, it

Has its centre
Well nurtured — we know

Where — in pride, but spiritual poise, it has its
centre where?

My ears are sensitized to more than the sound of

The wind. I see

And I hear, unlike the

Wandlike body of which one hears so much, which
was made

To see and not to see; to hear and not to hear,

That tree trunk without

Roots, accustomed to shout

Its own thoughts to itself like a shell, maintained
intact

By who knows what strange pressure of the at-
mosphere; that

Spiritual

Brother to the coral

Plant, absorbed into which, the equable sapphire
light

Becomes a nebulous green. The I of each is to

The I of each,

A kind of fretful speech

Which sets a limit on itself; the

Black earth preceded by a tendril? It is to that

Phenomenon

The above formation,

Translucent like the atmosphere — a cortex
merely —

That on which darts cannot strike decisively the
first

Time, a substance

Needful as an instance

Of the indestructibility of matter; it

Has looked at the electricity and at the earth-

Quake and is still

Here; the name means thick. Will

Depth be depth, thick skin be thick, to one who
can see no

Beautiful element of unreason under it?

THE FISH

wade

through black jade.

Of the crow blue mussel shells, one

keeps

adjusting the ash heaps;

opening and shutting itself like

an

injured fan.

The barnacles which encrust the

side

of the wave, cannot hide
there; for the submerged shafts of the

sun,

split like spun

glass, move themselves with spotlight swift-
ness

into the crevices —
in and out, illuminating

the

turquoise sea

of bodies. The water drives a
wedge
of iron into the edge
of the cliff, whereupon the stars

pink

rice grains, ink

bespattered jelly-fish, crabs like
green
lilies and submarine
toadstools, slide each on the other.

All

external

marks of abuse are present on
this
defiant edifice —
all the physical features of

ac-

cident — lack

of cornice, dynamite grooves, burns
and

hatchet strokes, these things stand
out on it; the chasm side is

dead.

Repeated

evidence has proved that it can
live

on what can not revive
its youth. The sea grows old in it.

DOCK RATS

There are human beings who seem to regard the place
as craftily as we do — who seem to feel that it is a
good place to come home to. On what a river;
wide — twinkling like a chopped sea under some
of the finest shipping in the

world: the square-rigged four-master, the liner, the
battleship like the two-thirds submerged section of
an iceberg; the tug — strong-moving thing, dip-
ping and pushing, the bell striking as it comes; the
steam yacht, lying like a new made arrow on the

stream; the ferry-boat — a head assigned, one to each compartment, making a row of chessmen set for play. When the wind is from the east, the smell is of apples; of hay, the aroma increased and decreased suddenly as the wind changes;

of rope; of mountain leaves for florists. When it is from the west, it is an elixir. There is occasionally a parokeet arrived from Brazil, clasping and clawing; or a monkey — tail and feet in readiness for an over-

ture. All palms and tail; how delightful! There is the sea, moving the bulkhead with its horse strength; and the multiplicity of rudders and propellers; the signals, shrill, questioning, peremptory, diverse; the wharf cats and the barge dogs — it

is easy to overestimate the value of such things. One does not live in such a place from motives of expediency but because to one who has been accustomed to it, shipping is the most congenial thing in the world.

ENGLAND

with its baby rivers and little towns, each with its abbey or its cathedral;

with voices — one voice perhaps, echoing through
the transept — the
criterion of suitability and convenience; and Italy
with its equal
shores — contriving an epicureanism from which
the grossness has been

extracted: and Greece with its goats and its gourds,
the nest of modified illusions:

and France, the “chrysalis of the nocturnal butterfly” in

whose products, mystery of construction diverts one
from that which was the object of one’s
search — substance at the core: and the far
East with its snails, its emotional

shorthand and jade cockroaches, its rock crystal and
its imperturbability,

all of museum quality: and America where there
is the little old ramshackle victoria in the south,
where cigars are smoked on the
street in the north; where there are no proof
readers, no silkworms, no digressions;

the wild man’s land; grass-less, links-less, language-
less country — in which letters are written
not in Spanish, not in Greek, not in Latin, not in
shorthand

but in plain American which cats and dogs can read!

The letter "a" in psalm and calm, when
pronounced with the sound of "a" in candle, is
very noticeable but

why should continents of misapprehension have to
be accounted for by the

fact? Does it follow that because there are
poisonous toadstools

which resemble mushrooms, both are dangerous? In
the case of mettle-someness which may be
mistaken for appetite, of heat which may ap-
pear to be haste, no con-

clusions may be drawn. To have misappre-
hended the matter, is to have confessed

that one has not looked far enough. The sub-
limated wisdom

of China, Egyptian discernment, the cataclysmic tor-
rent of emotion compressed

in the verbs of the Hebrew language, the books
of the man who is able

to say, "I envy nobody but him and him only, who
catches more fish than

I do,"—the flower and fruit of all that noted
superi-

ority—should one not have stumbled upon it in
America, must one imagine

that it is not there? It has never been confined
to one locality.

POETRY

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important
beyond all this fiddle.

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it,
one discovers that there is in
it after all, a place for the genuine.

Hands that can grasp, eyes
that can dilate, hair that can rise
if it must, these things are important not be-
cause a

high sounding interpretation can be put upon them
but because they are
useful; when they became so derivative as to
become unintelligible, the
same thing may be said for all of us — that we
do not admire what
we cannot understand. The bat,
holding on upside down or in quest of some-
thing to

eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll,
a tireless wolf under
a tree, the immovable critic twinkling his skin like a
horse that feels a flea, the base-
ball fan, the statistician — case after case
could be cited did

one wish it; nor it is valid
to discriminate against "business documents
and

school-books"; all these phenomena are important.

One must make a distinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half
poets,
the result is not poetry,
nor till the autocrats among use can be
"literalists of
the imagination" — above
insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads
in them, shall we have

it. In the meantime, if you demand on one hand,
in defiance of their opinion —

the raw material of poetry in
all its rawness, and
that which is on the other hand,
genuine, then you are interested in poetry.

THE SONG OF IRON

I

Not yet hast Thou sounded
Thy clangorous music,
Whose strings are under the mountains . . .
Not yet hast Thou spoken
The blooded, implacable Word . . .

But I hear in the Iron singing —
In the triumphant roaring of the steam and pistons
 pounding —
Thy barbaric exhortation . . .
And the blood leaps in my arteries, unproved,
Answering Thy call . . .
All my spirit is inundated with the tumultuous passion
 of Thy Voice,
And sings exultant with the Iron,
For now I know I too am of Thy Chosen . . .

Oh fashioned in fire —
Needing flame for Thy ultimate word —
Behold me, a cupola
Poured to Thy use!

Heed not my tremulous body

That faints in the grip of Thy gauntlet.
Break it . . . and cast it aside . . .
But make of my spirit
That dares and endures
Thy crucible . . .
Pour through my soul
Thy molten, world-whelming song.

. . . Here at Thy uttermost gate
Like a new Mary, I wait . . .

II

Charge the blast furnace, workman . . .
Open the valves —
Drive the fires high . . .
(Night is above the gates.)

How golden-hot the ore is
From the cupola spurting,
Tossing the flaming petals
Over the silt and the furnace ash —
Blown leaves, devastating,
Falling about the world . . .

Out of the furnace mouth —
Out of the giant mouth —
The raging, turgid mouth —
Fall fiery blossoms

Gold with the gold of buttercups
In a field at sunset,
Or huskier gold of dandelions,
Warmed in sun-leavings,
Or changing to the paler hue
At the creamy hearts of primroses.

Charge the converter, workman —
Tired from the long night?
But the earth shall suck up darkness —
The earth that holds so much . . .
And out of these molten flowers,
Shall shape the heavy fruit . . .

Then open the valves —
Drive the fires high,
Your blossoms nurturing.
(Day is at the gates
And a young wind. . . .)
Put by your rod, comrade,
And look with me, shading your eyes . . .
Do you not see —
Through the lucent haze
Out of the converter rising —
In the spirals of fire
Smiting and blinding,
A shadowy shape
White as a flame of sacrifice,
Like a lily swaying?

III

The ore is leaping in the crucibles,
The ore communicant,
Sending faint thrills along the leads . . .
Fire is running along the roots of the mountains . . .
I feel the long recoil of the earth
As under a mighty quickening . . .
(Dawn is aglow in the light of the Iron . . .)
All palpitant, I wait . . .

IV

Here ye, Dictator — late Lords of the Iron,
Shut in your council rooms, palsied, depowered —
The blooded, implacable Word?
Not whispered in cloture, one to the other,
(Brother in fear of the fear of his brother . . .)
But chanted and thundered
On the brazen, articulate tongues of the Iron
Babbling in flame . . .

Sung to the rhythm of prisons dismantled,
Manacles riven and ramparts defaced . . .
(Hearts death-anointed yet hearing life calling
 . . .)
Ankle chains bursting and gallows unbraced . . .
Sung to the rhythm of arsenals burning . . .
Clangor of iron smashing on iron,

Turmoil of metal and dissonant baying
Of mail-sided monsters shattered asunder . . .

Hulks of black turbines all mangled and roaring,
Battering egress through ramparted walls . . .
Mouthing of engines, made rabid with power,
Into the holocaust snorting and plunging . . .

Mighty converters torn from their axes,
Flung to the furnaces, vomiting fire,
Jumbled in white-heated masses disshapen . . .
Writhing in flame-tortured levers of iron . . .

Gnashing of steel serpents twisting and dying . . .
Screeching of steam-glutted cauldrons rending . . .
Shock of leviathans prone on each other . . .
Scale flanks touching, ore entering ore . . .
Steel haunches closing and grappling and swaying
In the waltz of the mating locked mammoths of iron,
Tasting the turbulent fury of living,
Mad with a moment's exuberant living!
Crash of devastating hammers despoiling . . .
Hands inexorable, marring
What hands had so cunningly moulded . . .

Structures of steel welded, subtly tempered,
Marvelous wrought of the wizards of ore,
Torn into octaves discordantly clashing,
Chords never final but onward progressing

In monstrous fusion of sound ever smiting on sound
in mad vortices whirling . . .

Till the ear, tortured, shrieks for cessation
Of the raving inharmonies hatefully mingling . . .
The fierce obligato the steel pipes are screaming . . .
The blare of the rude molten music of Iron . . .

THE FIGHT

Smoke — more smoke — thickening the air, staining the air blue-grey, rising on waves of breath, and falling, and filling the channels of breath, and reddening eyes.

Smoke — wreathing the rafters, lying in grey-blue folds over the sloping bank of men — they may be men over there, men's faces and bodies slanting down to the parapet.

Smoke — fighting with the glare of the reflectors, fighting the bald splendor of the canvas-padded ring, with the fleshy faces of the seconds, bare bodies, suspender buckles, white shirt-fronts, and the referee's gold watch chain. *Smoke* — fighting and always losing.

Smoke — stung with sudden victories of flame, tiny fireflies that spurt, wink, spread glowing orange over faces framed in writhing twists of blue-grey. *Smoke* — fighting and losing.

Voices — striking down upon the ring, curving like blows around the rocking heads of the fighters, landing on my ears.

Voices — glancing over my shoulders, rumbling through my veins. I echo them under my breath: A brave rush, Tony! A fine left, Jack!

Smoke — more smoke — I make it myself. My eyes strain through the smother, my eyeballs push and tug at their muscles.

Bang! goes the bell. There's the flash of a left, the crook of an elbow, the twist of a nude torso, a right cross darts over a shoulder, into the air above a bullet-head — a locking of arms, the thud of a glove ramming a naked side — a dashing referee cuts the locked forearms, lifts the lowered heads, slices between breasts jamming like savage bulls, and dancing out into the open, leaves a neutral zone behind him — now, as he whirls, before him: *Hiss!* a gloved left lines across the gap, a shoulder blocks the jab and launches a viperous answer into space as a cropped head shifts an inch, the short rights follow in, the lock snaps shut, again the tattoo drumming on the ribs — a muffled buzz of bated breath — and again the referee with his key parts the dovetailed fighters — once more the zone, the hissing leads, frowning looks, tense and bitter, straining for an instant's target — legs spring, feet patter, the lefts leap, the rights zig-zag, miss or glance, locked again —

the drumming — sweltering in a fiery space, walled in smoke — *Bang!* goes the bell.

Voices — Very scientific in his feet: sings a bored Irish voice across the hall — a laugh rolls along the tiers, sweeps into a roar — a murmur of repetitions: What did he say? Very scientific in his feet — A spatter of belated laughs.

Back to Greece — Two thousands of years ago, several hundreds, some odd months and days, to be exact, and all of Greece that could get there, watched the same thing under the olive-ripening sun on the plains of the Alpheus, at Olympia. Jack Britton was then Theagenes, a bull of a man, with mountains of muscle flanking the column of his neck — and Ted Lewis was Euthymus, eager, hopeless, and undaunted — then they wore leather thongs upon their hands — and we were Greeks, our backs to the door, and on the further side of the frail boards was black Barbarianism, crushing to break in upon us.

So it was, and is: skill, quivering light brains, muscles flexing and snapping, lefts and rights; and against them, the Brute, sagging with sheer gravity of bulk upon the candle-flame of Intelligence.

Greek and Barbarian, skill and Brute, light and

dark, over and over — victory and defeat, shuffled confusedly in the smoke.

Something sighs in me when the Brute is baffled, the jeer of the crowd is my jeer — I like the knock-out too, but I like it to come as lightning comes, and when it does the triumph makes me sad — for red Brutality outwitted by grey Skill, for grey Skill stunned and reddened by dull Brutality. Which wins? The Brute, he always wins, and Science never loses. And Art sits on the sidelines and wins bets from each of them.

Phidias might sign his name under that moving frieze of nakedness, gliding through areas of smoke in ten thousand instants of beauty.

HUMDRUM

If I had a million lives to live
and a million deaths to die
in a million humdrum worlds,

I'd like to change my name
and have a new house number to go by
each and every time I died
and started life all over again.

I wouldn't want the same name every time
and the same old house number always,
dying a million deaths,
dying one by one a million times:
— would you?

or you?

or you?

AUTUMN MOVEMENT

I cried over beautiful things knowing no beautiful
thing lasts.

The field of cornflower yellow is a scarf at the neck
of the copper sunburned woman, the mother of
the year, the taker of seeds.

The northwest wind comes and the yellow is torn full
of holes, new beautiful things come in the first
spit of snow on the northwest wind, and the old
things go, not one lasts.

POOL

Out of the fire
Came a man sunken
To less than cinders,
A tea-cup of ashes or so.
And I,
The gold in the house,
Writhed into a stiff pool.

BONES

Sling me under the sea.
Pack me down in the salt and wet.
No farmer's plow shall touch my bones.
No Hamlet hold my jaws and speak
How jokes are gone and empty is my mouth.
Long, green-eyed scavengers shall pick my eyes,

Purple fish play hide-and-see,
And I shall be song of thunder, crash of sea,
Down on the floors of salt and wet.

Sling me . . . under the sea.

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Those years are foliage of trees,
their trunks hidden by bushes;
behind them a grey haze topped with silver
hides the swinging steps of my first love
the Danube.

On its face
grave steel palaces with smoking torches,
parading monasteries moved slowly to the Black Sea
till the bared branches scratched the north wind.

On its bed
a great Leviathan waited
for the ceremonies on the arrival of Messiah
and bobbing small fishes snapped sun splinters
for the pleasure of the monster.

Along its shores
red capped little hours danced
with rainbow colored kites,
messengers to heaven.

My memory is a sigh
of swallows swinging
through a slow dormant summer
to a timid line on the horizon.

FLAMINGO DREAMS

A green and copper-backed frog
keeps me from seeing
brick-colored eucalyptus flowers
dancing on an apple-green sky ;
large rose-hued cotton fists
with gold knuckles
chase a blushing sun
into a purple, lead sea :
I am hungry and he is cautious.

CONSCIENCE

This evening more than ever,
my ancient, despised Hebrew priest,
warped by the hot Arabian sun,
inflicted his heart-scorching sermon ;
burnishing with impatient feet
a whisper of duty in my heart,
commanding, beseeching,
that I offer on his altar.
And a strong white-hot wind blew
my brothers' woes into my veins.

SADNESS

It is a huge curtain,
stretched at a distance around me.
Aimless gypsies crawl up and over the curtain.
They are my days.
They neither sing nor laugh
but hop over the top of my sadness.
Here and there one wears a gay shirt.
He is faster than the rest.
Even in my sleep with closed eyes
I cannot pierce this drapery.
Some day I will wind a child's smile around my face
and thus disguised
slip through the curtain and jump . . .
Where?
Ah yes, where?

RAIN

Like crawling black monsters
the big clouds tap at my window,
their shooting liquid fingers slide
over the staring panes
and merge on the red wall.
Some of the fingers pull at the hinges

and whisper insistently: "Let us come in,
the cruel wind whips and drives us
till we are sore and in despair."

But I cannot harbor the big crawling black clouds,
I cannot save them from the angry wind.

In a tiny crevice of my aching heart
there is a big storm brewing
and loud clamour and constant prayer
for the reflection of snow-capped mountains
on a distant lake.

Tired and dazed I sit on a bear skin
and timidly listen to the concert of storms.

MARGRETHE

You are an ice covered twig
with a quiet, smiling sap.
The spring winds of life
have tested your steel-blade soul
and the harsh breath of men
covered you with a frigid shell.
But under the transparent ice
I have seen your warm hand
ready to tear the shell
and grasp the love-sun's heat,
and your cool morning eyes
look clear and calm into the day.

BEFORE SUNRISE

Before it was day
I climbed to meet the sun
half way
on the side of a mountain.
A high cool pond
poured down over rocks
to a slow dreamy valley
singing of new born clouds.
Facing the warm reflections
on the quiet sky
I bowed and kissed the dew
on the young grass.
But soon I felt guilty.
What had I done?
What is the dew
on young grass?

MEETING

Her glance swung my body
like a bell
in a long forgotten church
and the tingling emotions came forth
like sounds summoned,
at attention,

grouped around an altar
of a great love.
Stiff like a bronze pillar
I came
and drank the two tears
her eyes offered
like raised crystals
at a solemn farewell meeting.

THE NIGHT SHIFT

They are like pick axes,
they never argue,
and never smile.
They tramp through the darkness
to work.
They tramp through the darkness
home to sleep.
They are like pick axes,
and with solemn faces
go through glass and iron
and through cement.
With their hard hands
they kill the night.
They are like pick axes,
they never worry,
and never think, is it wrong.
If it is,
they will make a good job of it.

They move like fate
and each hides a scar,
somewhere in the night,
and tells the world
to go to hell.

MOOD

The end of my wish
Walks near me smiling;
With subtle fingers I loosen
Little shining, sharp chips
From the crystal body
With its many enticing shadows.

A fine silk thread
Is desire,
These sweet but sharp edges
Its end.
Shall I add one more flaw
To my dream veil.

VIENNESE WALTZ

Dresden china shepherdesses
Whirl in the silver sunshine:
Columbine stars
Float in gauze petticoats of light . . .

Little Columbine ghosts, wrinkled and old,
Smelling of jasmine and camphor;
Prim arms folded over immaculate breasts . . .

The pirouetting tune dies . . .
Stars and little faded faces,
Waltzing, waltzing,
Shoot slowing downward
On tinkling music,
Dusty little flowers,
Sinking into oblivion . . .

After the music,
Quiet,
The glacial period renewed,
Monsters on earth,
A mad conflagration of worlds on ardent nights . . .

These too vanishing . . .
Silence unending.

THE DEATH OF COLUMBINE

White breast beaten in sea waves,
Hair tangled in foam,
Lonely sky,
Desolate horizon,
Pale and shining clouds:
All this desolate and shining sea is no place for you,
My dead Columbine.

And the waves will bite your breast;
And the wind that does not know death from life
Will leap upon you and leer into your eyes
And suck at your dead lips.

Oh, my little Columbine,
You go farther and farther away from me,
Out where there are no ships
And the solemn clouds
Soar across the somber horizon.

PIETÀ

The child —
Warm chubby thighs, fat brown arms,
An unsurprised face —
Cries for jam.
The mother buys him with jam . . .

An old woman
Tottering on lean leather-skinned legs
Sucks with glazing eyes
The crystal silken milk
That flows from the death wound
In a young flower-soft, jewel-soft body.

RAINY TWILIGHT

Dim gold faces float in the windows,
Subtle as perfume,
Soft as flowers.
Dim gold faces and gilded arms
Are clinging along the silver ladders of rain,
Climbing with ivory lamps held high ;
Starry lamps
Over which the silver ladders
Thicken into nets of twilight.

TROPIC WINTER

The afternoon is frozen with memories,
Radiant as ice.
The sun sets amidst the agued trembling of the
leaves ;
Sinking right down through the gold air

Into the arms of the sea.
And the enameled wings of the palm trees
Keep shivering, shivering,
Beating the gold air thin . . .

LULLABY

I lean my heart against the soft bosomed night:
A white globed breast,
And warm and silent flowing,
The milk of the moon.

JAPANESE MOON

Thick clustered wistaria clouds,
A young girl moon in mist of almond flowers,
Boughs and boughs of light;
Then a round faced ivory lady
Nodding among fading chrysanthemums.

THE NAID

The moon rises,
Glistening,
Naked white,
Out of her stream.

Wet marble shoulders
Shake star drops on the clouds.

NIGHT MUSIC

Through the blue water of night
Rises the white bubble of silence —
Rises,
And breaks :
The shivered crystal bell of the moon,
Dying away in star splinters.
The still mists bear the sound
Beyond the horizon.

STARS

Like naked maidens
Dancing with no thought of lovers,
Blinking stars with dewy silver breasts
Pass through the darkness.
White and eager,
They glide on,
Toward the grey meshed web of dawn,
And the mystery of morning.

Then,
About me,
The white cloud walls
Stand as sternly as sepulchres,
And from all sides,

Peer and linger the startled faces,
Pale in the harshness of the sunlight.

VENUS' FLY TRAP

A wax bubble moon trembles on the honey-blue
horizon.
Softly heated by your breast
Pearl wax languorously unfolds her lily lips of mist,
And swells about you,
Weaves you into herself through each moist pore,
Absorbs you deliciously,
Destroys you.

MONOCHROME

Grey sails,
Grey sky drifting down to the sea.
Old, ugly, and stern,
The night lies down upon the water,
And it quivers in the twilight
Like a tortured belly.

THE RED CROSS

Antiseptic smells that corrode the nostrils
Crumble me,
Eat me deep,

And my garments disintegrate.
First my nightgown,
Leaving my naked arms and legs disjointed,
Sprawled about the bed in postures meaningless to
the point of obscenity.

My breasts shrivel,
The nipples drawn like withered plums
To the eyes of the bright young nurse.
I am nothing but a dull eye myself,
An eye out of a socket,
Bursting,
Contorted with hideous wisdom.
Eye to eye we fight in the death throes,
Myself and the young nurse.

Her firm crisp aproned breast leans toward the bed
As she smoothes the rumpled pillow back
With long cool fingers.

CROWDS

The sky along the street a gauzy yellow —
The narrow lights burn tall in the twilight.

The cool air sags,
Heavy with the thickness of bodies.
I am elated with bodies.

They have stolen me from myself.
I love the way they beat me to life,
Pay me for their cruelties.
In the close intimacy I feel for them
There is the indecency I like.
I belong to them,
To these whom I hate,
And because we can never know each other,
Or be anything to each other,
Though we have been the most,
I sell so much of me that could bring a better price.

THE LONG MOMENT

A white sigh clouds the fields
Into quietness.
Above the billowed snow
I drift,
One year,
Two years,
Three years.
Hurt eyes mist in the blue behind me.
The moon uncoils in glistening ropes
And I glide downward along the dripping rays
To a marble lake.

AUTUMN NIGHT

The moon is as complacent as a frog.
She sits in the sky like a blind white stone,
And does not even see Love
As she caresses his face
With her contemptuous light.
She reaches her long white shivering fingers into the
bowels of men.

Her tender superfluous probing into all that pol-
lutes
Is like the immodesty of the mad.
She is a mad woman holding up her dress
So that her white belly shines.
Haughty,
Impregnable,
Ridiculous,
Silent and white as a debauched queen,
Her ecstasy is that of a cold and sensual child.

She is Death enjoying Life,
Innocently,
Lasciviously.

LOVE POEMS IN AUTUMN

I. The Arrival

Shining highways
Sing to your step,
Windows beckon,
Doorways open a square embrace.

Doors laugh gently
Swinging together
Behind you.

II. There's A Guest

There's a flag on my tower,
And my windows
Are orange to the night.
They are set in grey stone that frowns
At the black wind.

Inside, there's a guest at my hearth,
And a fire
Painting the grey stone gold.
My windows are black
With the hungry night peering through them.

Blackness lurks in corners,
Wind snatches the sparks,
Tongs and poker jangle together
Like the iron bones
Of a man that was hanged.

III. They Who Dance

The feet of dancers
Shine with laughter,
Their hearts are vibrant as bells;

The air flows by them
Divided, like water
Before a gleaming ship.

Triumphantly their bodies sing,
Their eyes
Are blind with music.

They move through threatening ghosts,
Feeling them cool as mist
Against their brows.

They who dance
Find infinite golden floors
Beneath their feet.

IV. Pianissimo

I took Night
Into my arms,
Night lay upon my breast.

If Night had wings
She would have brought me
Stars for my hair.

The stars laughed
Lightly
From far away —
About my shoulders
White mist curled.

V. Portrait By Zuloaga

Death lies in wait
For those who do not know
What they desire,
And Hell for those who fear
What they have taken.

These hands are wrinkled
From stretching forth,
Brown
From the winds
Blowing upon them.

They are strong with seizing.
They do not tremble.

VI. Gestures

Let there be dancing figures
On our wine-flask,
Swastikas on our rug,
Inscriptions in our rings
And on our dwelling.

Let us build ritual
For our worship,
Pledge our love
With vows and holy promises.

If we break oaths
Let it be darkly
With threatening gestures.
Thus we ignore
That we love and die
Like insects.

VII. Veils

I shall punish your blindness
With a veil.

I shall choose words that join

Gaily, word to word,
I shall weave them flauntingly
Into veil upon veil,
I shall wind them defiantly
Over my lips, over my eyes.

You shall not see your name
On my lips,
You shall not see your image
In my eyes!

And through my veils I shall not see
That you are blind.

VIII. Freedom

I would be free
From two superstitions,
Thanks and Forgiveness.

So I would think of you
As Flame,
As Wind,
As Night,
To whom I have been
Wind,
And Flame,
And Night. . . .

Together burned and swept,
Now drowned
In separate darkness.

IX. Mud

I am dazed and weary
From the shapelessness
Of what I am —

I am poured
Among haphazard stones
In meaningless patterns.

Yesterday's sun dried me
Between rounded cobbles,
Today's deluge sweeps me
Toward alien pavements,
To-morrow's sun shall dry me
In a new design.

Better the turbid gutter
Toward the open sea!

X. Fools Say —

November's breath
Is black in the branches of trees
And under the bushes;

Harsh rain
Whips down the rustling branch
Of leaves.

There is smoke
In the throat of the wind,
Its teeth
Bite away beauty.

Let fools say :
“ Spring
Will come again ! ”

LE MONOCLE DE MON ONCLE

I

“Mother of heaven, regina of the clouds,
O sceptre of the sun, crown of the moon,
There is not nothing, no, no, never nothing,
Like the clashed edges of two words that kill.”
And so I mocked her in magnificent measure.
Or was it that I mocked myself alone?
I wish that I might be a thinking stone.
The sea of spuming thought foists up again
The radiant bubble that she was. And then
A deep up-pouring from some saltier well
Within me, bursts its watery syllable.

II

A red bird flies across the golden floor.
It is a red bird that seeks out his choir
Among the choirs of wind and wet and wing.
A torrent will fall from him when he finds.
Shall I uncrumple this much-crumpled thing?
I am a man of fortune greeting heirs;
For it has come that thus I greet the spring.
These choirs of welcome choir for me farewell.
No spring can follow past meridian.

Yet you persist with anecdotal bliss
To make believe a starry *connaissance*.

III

Is it for nothing, then, that old Chinese
Sat tittivating by their mountain pools
Or in the Yangste studied out their beards?
I shall not play the flat historic scale.
You know how Utamaro's beauties sought
The end of love in their all-speaking braids.
You know the mountainous coiffures of Bath.
Alas! Have all the barbers lived in vain
That not one curl in nature has survived?
Why, without pity on these studious ghosts,
Do you come dripping in your hair from sleep?

IV

This luscious and impeccable fruit of life
Falls, it appears, of its own weight to earth.
When you were Eve, its acrid juice was sweet,
Untasted, in its heavenly, orchard air —
An apple serves as well as any skull
To be the book in which to read a round,
And is as excellent, in that it is composed
Of what, like skulls, comes rotting back to ground.
But it excels in this that as the fruit
Of love, it is a book too mad to read
Before one merely reads to pass the time.

V

In the high West there burns a furious star.
It is for fiery boys that star was set
And for sweet-smelling virgins close to them.
The measure of the intensity of love
Is measure, also, of the verve of earth.
For me, the firefly's quick, electric stroke
Ticks tediously the time of one more year.
And you? Remember how the crickets came
Out of their mother grass, like little kin . . .
In the pale nights, when your first imagery
Found inklings of your bond to all that dust.

VI

If men at forty will be painting lakes
The ephemeral blues must merge for them in one,
The basic slate, the universal hue.
There is a substance in us that prevails.
But in our amours amorists discern
Such fluctuations that their scrivening
Is breathless to attend each quirky turn.
When amorists grow bald, then amours shrink
Into the compass and curriculum
Of introspective exiles, lecturing.
It is a theme for Hyacinth alone.

VII

The mules that angels ride come slowly down
The blazing passes, from beyond the sun.
Descensions of their tinkling bells arrive.
These muleteers are dainty of their way.
Meantime, centurions guffaw and beat
Their shrilling tankards on the table-boards.
This parable, in sense, amounts to this:
The honey of heaven may or may not come,
But that of earth both comes and goes at once.
Suppose these couriers brought amid their train
A damsel heightened by eternal bloom. . . .

VIII

Like a dull scholar, I behold, in love,
An ancient aspect touching a new mind.
It comes, it blooms, it bears its fruit and dies.
This trival trope reveals a way of truth.
Our bloom is gone. We are the fruit thereof.
Two golden gourds distended on our vines,
We hang like warty squashes, streaked and rayed,
Into the autumn weather, splashed with frost,
Distorted by hale fatness, turned grotesque.
The laughing sky will see the two of us
Washed into rinds by rotting winter rains.

IX

In verses wild with motion, full of din,
Loudened by cries, by clashes, quick and sure
As the deadly thought of men accomplishing
Their curious fates in war, come, celebrate
The faith of forty, ward of Cupido.
Most venerable heart, the lustiest conceit
Is not too lusty for your broadening.
I quiz all sounds, all thoughts, all everything
For the music and manner of the paladins
To make oblation fit. Where shall I find
Bravura adequate to this great hymn?

X

The fops of fancy in their poems leave
Memorabilia of the mystic spouts,
Spontaneously watering their gritty soils.
I am a yeoman, as such fellows go.
I know no magic trees, no balmy boughs,
No silver-ruddy, gold-vermilion fruits.
But, after all, I know a tree that bears
A semblance to the thing I have in mind.
It stands gigantic, with a certain tip
To which all birds come sometime in their time.
But when they go that tip still tips the tree.

XI

If sex were all, then every trembling hand
Could make us squeak, like dolls, the wished-for
words.

But note the unconscionable treachery of fate,
That makes us weep, laugh, grunt and groan, and
shout

Doleful heroics, pinching gestures forth
From madness or delight, without regard
To that first, foremost law. Anguishing hour!
Last night, we sat beside a pool of pink,
Clipped with lilies, scudding the bright chromes,
Keen to the point of starlight, while a frog
Boomed from his very belly, odious chords.

XII

A blue pigeon it is, that circles the blue sky,
On side-long wing, around and round and round.
A white pigeon it is, that flutters to the ground,
Grown tired of flight. Like a dark rabbi, I
Observed, when young, the nature of mankind,
In lordly study. Every day, I found
Man proved a gobbet in my mincing world.
Like a rose rabbi, later, I pursued,
And still pursue, the origin and course
Of love, but until now I never knew
That fluttering*things have so distinct a shade.

PECKSNIFFIANA

FABLIAU OF FLORIDA

Barque of phosphor
On the palmy beach,

Move outward into heaven,
Into the alabasters
And night blues.

Foam and cloud are one.
Sultry moon-monsters
Are dissolving.

Fill your black hull
With white moonlight.

There will never be an end
To this droning of the surf.

HOMUNCULUS ET LA BELLE ETOILE

In the sea, Biscayne, there prinks
The young emerald, evening star —
Good light for drunkards, poets, widows,
And ladies soon to be married.

By this light the salty fishes
Arch in the sea like tree-branches,
Going in many directions
Up and down.

This light conducts
The thoughts of drunkards, the feelings
Of widows and trembling ladies,
The movements of fishes.

How pleasant an existence it is
That this emerald charms philosophers,
Until they become thoughtlessly willing
To bathe their hearts in later moonlight,

Knowing that they can bring back thought
In the night that is still to be silent,
Reflecting this thing and that,
Before they sleep.

It is better that, as scholars,
They should think hard in the dark cuffs
Of voluminous cloaks,
And shave their heads and bodies.

It might well be that their mistress
Is no gaunt fugitive phantom.
She might, after all, be a wanton,
Abundantly beautiful, eager.

Fecund,
From whose being by starlight, on sea-coast,
The innermost good of their seeking
Might come in the simplest of speech.

It is a good light, then, for those
That know the ultimate Plato,
Tranquillizing with this jewel
The torments of confusion.

EXPOSITION OF THE CONTENTS OF A CAB

Victoria Clementina, negress,
Took seven white dogs
To ride in a cab.

Bells of the dog chinked.
Harness of the horses shuffled
Like brazen shells.

Oh-hé-hé! Fragrant puppets
By the green lake-pallors,
She too is flesh,

And a breech-cloth might wear,
Netted of topaz and ruby
And savage blooms;

Thridding the squawkiest jungle

In a golden sedan,
White dogs at bay.

What breech-cloth might you wear —
Except linen, embroidered
By elderly women?

PLOUGHING ON SUNDAY

The white cock's tail
Tosses in the wind.
The turkey-cock's tail
Glitters in the sun.

Water in the fields.
The wind pours down.
The feathers flare
And bluster in the wind.

Remus, blow your horn!
I'm ploughing on Sunday,
Ploughing North America.
Blow your horn!

Tum-ti-tum,
Ti-tum-tum-tum!
The turkey-cock's tail
Spreads to the sun.

The white cock's tail
Streams to the moon.

Water in the fields.
The wind pours down.

BANAL SOJOURN

Two wooden tubs of blue hydrangeas stand at the
foot of the stone steps.
The sky is a blue gum streaked with rose. The
trees are black.
The grackles crack their throats of bone in the
smooth air.
Moisture and heat have swollen the garden into a
slum of bloom.
Pardie! Summer is like a fat beast, sleepy in
mildew,
Our old bane, green and bloated, serene, who cries,
"That bliss of stars, that princox of evening
heaven!" reminding of seasons,
When radiance came running down, slim through the
bareness.
And so it is one damns that green shade at the
bottom of the land.
For who can care at the wigs despoiling the Satan
ear?
And who does not seek the sky unfuzzed, soaring to
the princox?
One has a malady here, a malady. One feels a
malady.

OF THE SURFACE OF THINGS

I

In my room, the world is beyond my understanding;
But when I walk I see that it consists of three or
four hills and a cloud.

II

From my balcony, I survey the yellow air,
Reading where I have written,
“The spring is like a belle undressing.”

III

The gold tree is blue.
The singer has pulled his cloak over his head.
The moon is in the folds of the cloak.

THE CURTAINS IN THE HOUSE OF THE
METAPHYSICIAN

It comes about that the drifting of these curtains
Is full of long motions; as the ponderous
Deflations of distance or as clouds
Inseparable from their afternoons;
Or the changing of light, the dropping
Of the silence, wide sleep and solitude
Of night, in which all motion
Is beyond us, as the firmament,

Up-rising and down-falling, bares
The last largeness, bold to see.

THE PALTRY NUDE STARTS ON A SPRING VOYAGE

But not on a shell, she starts,
Archaic, for the sea.
But on the first-found weed
She scuds the glitters,
Noiselessly, like one more wave.

She too is discontent
And would have purple stuff upon her arms,
Tired of the salty harbors,
Eager for the brine and bellowing
Of the high interiors of the sea.

The wind speeds her,
Blowing upon her hands
And watery back.
She touches the clouds, where she goes,
In the circle of her traverse of the sea.

Yet this is meagre play
In the scurry and water-shine,
As her heels foam —
Not as when the goldener nude
Of a later day

Will go, like the centre of sea-green pomp,
In an intenser calm,
Scullion of fate,
Across the spick torrent, ceaselessly,
Upon her irretrievable way.

FLOWERS OF AUGUST

I

DAISY

The dayseye hugging the earth
in August, ha! Spring is
gone down in purple,
weeds stand high in the corn,
the rainbeaten furrow
is clotted with sorrel
and crabgrass, the
branch is black under
the heavy mass of the leaves —
The sun is upon a
slender green stem
ribbed lengthwise.
He lies on his back —
it is a woman also —
he regards his former
majesty and
round the yellow center,
split and creviced and done into
minute flower heads, he sends out
his twenty rays — a little,

and the wind is among them
to grow cool there!
One turns the thing over
in his hand and looks
at it from the rear: brownedged,
green and pointed scales
armor his yellow.
But turn and turn
the crisp petals remain
brief, translucent, greenfastened,
barely touching at the edges:
blades of limpid seashell.
The sun has shortened his desire
to a petal's span!

II

QUEENANNSLACE

Her body is not so white as
anemone petals nor so smooth — nor
so remote a thing. It is a field
of the wild carrot — taking
the field by force, the grass
does not rise above it.
Here is no question of whiteness,
white as can be with a purple mole
at the center of each flower.
Each flower is a hand's span
of her whiteness. Wherever

his hand has lain there is
a tiny purple blemish. Each part
is a blossom under his touch
to which the fibres of her being
stem one by one, each to its end,
until the whole field is a
white desire, empty, a single stem,
a cluster, flower by flower,
a pious wish to whiteness gone
over — or nothing.

III

It is a small plant
delicately branched and
tapering conically
to a point, each branch
and the peak a wire for
green pods, blind lanterns
starting upward from
the stalk each way to
a pair of prickly edged blue
flowerets: it is her regard,
a little plant without leaves,
a finished thing guarding
its secret. Blue eyes —
but there are twenty looks
in one, alike as forty flowers
on twenty stems — Blue eyes

a little closed upon a wish
achieved and half lost again,
stemming back, garlanded
with green sacks of
satisfaction gone to seed,
back to a straight stem — if
one looks into you, trumpets — !
No. It is the pale hollow of
desire itself counting
over and over the moneys of
a stale achievement. Three
small lavender imploring tips
below and above them two
slender colored arrows
of disdain with anthers
between them and
at the edge of the goblet
a white lip, to drink from — !
And summer lifts her look
forty times over, forty times
over — namelessly.

IV

HEALALL

It is the daily love, grass high
they say that will cure her.
No good to reply: the sorrel never
has four leaves, if the clover

may — It is the hydraheaded pulpit,
but an impassioned one in this case,
purple, lined with white velvet
for a young priest — by what
lady's hand? Agh it is no pulpit
but a baying dog, a kennel of
purple dogs on one leash,
fangs bared — to keep away harm
and never caring for the place:
down the torn lane
where the cows pass,
under the appletree, nodding
against high tide or in the lea of
a pasture thistle, almost blue,
never far to seek, they say
it will cure her.

V

GREAT MULLEN

One leaves his leaves at home
being a mullen and sends up a lighthouse
to peer from: I will have my way,
yellow — A mast with a lantern, ten
fifty, a hundred, smaller and smaller
as they grow more — Liar, liar, liar!
You come from her! I can smell djer-kiss
on your clothes. Ha, ha you come to me,
you — I am a point of dew on a grass-stem.

Why are you sending heat down on me
from your lantern? — You are coddling, a
dead stick with the bark off. She is
squirting on us both. She has had her
hand on you! — Well. — She has defiled
ME. — Your leaves are dull, thick
and hairy. — Every hair on my body will
hold you off from me. You are a
dungcake, birdlime on a fenceraill. —
I love you, straight, yellow,
finger of God pointing to — her!
Liar, broken weed, dungcake, you have —
I am a cricket waving his antennae
and you are high, grey and straight. Ha!

VI

BUTTERANDEGGS

It is a posture for two multiplied
into a bouquet, a kneeling mother
washing the feet of her naked infant
before crossed mirrors, shoes of
different pairs, a chinaman laughing
at a nigger, a maple mingling leaves
with an elm, it is butter and eggs:
yellow slippers with orange bows to them,
chickens and pigs in a barnyard,
not too important — the little double
favors, you and I, a shirt

handed to a naked man by his
barelegged wife, scratch my back
for me, oh and empty the slopbucket
when you go down — and get me
that flower, I can't reach it.
A low greyleaved thing
growing in clusters, how else? —
with a swollen head — slippers for sale,
they put mirrors in those stores
to make it seem — Closely packed
in a bouquet but never quite succeeding
to be more than — a passageway to
something else.

VII

THISTLE

They should have called the thistle —
well, it is that we, we love each other.
Our heads side by side have a purple
flamebed over them. We are one, we love
ourselves. The cows do not eat us nor tread
on us. It is a little like the lichen on
the blackened stones, a foaming winecup
with thorns on the handle. They say
jackasses eat them. Yes, and reindeer
eat lichen, lick them from the stones.
And we would be eaten — as England ate
Scotland? No.

It is the color they must eat if
they would have us. That offers itself
but that alone. The rest is for asses
or — forbidden. Purple! Striped bellied
flies and the black papillios are the
color-led evangels. Ah but they come
for the honey only. And so — a thistle.

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